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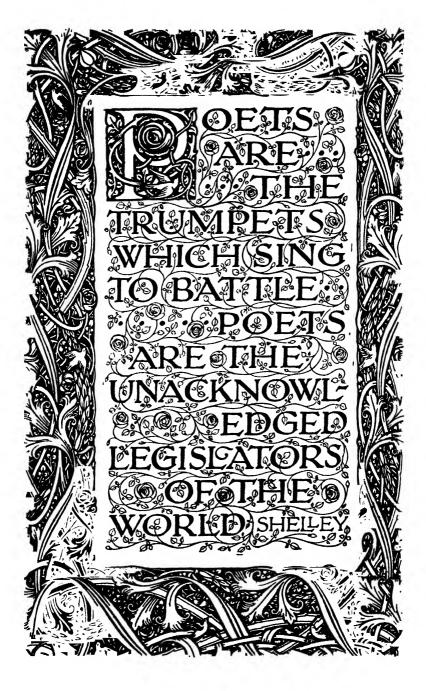
PIERS PLOWMAN
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
ARTHUR BURRELL, M.A.

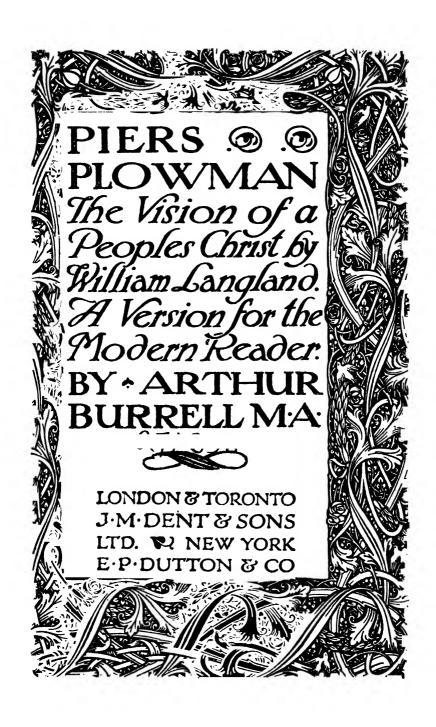
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FIRST PUBLISHED IN THIS EDITION . 1912
REPRINTED 1916, 1919, 1925, 1931



INTRODUCTION

In bringing before the reader a version of this amazing book, I wish, as in the case of my edition of the Canterbury Tales, to disarm, if I can, the criticism of the scholar. version is not intended in any sense for those who can read with ease the alliterative poems of the fourteenth or earlier centuries. Knowing, however, that it requires very careful study to read Piers Plowman with ease and pleasure, I have occasionally omitted and always simplified. I have tried to preserve and bring out the meaning, the careless alliteration, and the elusive rhythm. I have regularly modernised the spelling, and have indeed followed the example set by the most learned editor of the poem, who has himself published a modernised text: indeed there are several of such texts in the market. This, as in the case of the Chaucer, is the whole of my offence. The specialist will find echoes from M. Jusserand and Professor Skeat everywhere.

Piers Plowman is regarded as the poor mans book. But, though I hope the spirit is preserved, I have resolutely avoided by any phrase reading into it a special message for to-day. A comment with notes inwoven has indeed called attention to singular survivals, parallels in social life, but these parallels would, even without the reference to them, force themselves upon the attention of any one.

Much has been made about the confusion in the poem; but the main scheme is perfectly clear. Under the favourite form of a vision, it is a picture and an arraignment of the England of Edward III. and Richard II. As the first Isaiah, said to have been a young aristocrat, listened to the call in the Temple, and left a life of ease to act for thirty years as the unsparing critic of the Jerusalem and Judah of his day, so per contra our author, a man of humble extraction, it would seem, and of no social pretension, hurled his invective, his satire, and his grim fun at the London and the England of Chaucers time. He is an Old

Testament prophet with English humour added to Hebrew seriousness. We are, whatever we think of the question of authorship, in the presence of one who when in earnest is terribly in earnest, whether he is describing the great plain which lies below Malvern Hills, or the marriage of Jobbery to Falsehood, or the shriving of Gluttony and Wrath, or the iniquities of the hated lawyers at Westminster, or the beauty of Charity, or the triumphant march on Hell by Piers Plowman, the man Christ Jesus. Picture after picture paints the same story, preaches the same sermon: and the story and the sermon are these. The world is good enough if man were not so bad: the birds sing blissfully enough if underneath there droned not on the note of misery: life is sweet and jolly enough if men were not so bitter; Malvern Hills are fair enough if only in the plain, in the great Field Full of Folk, there were more charity, more honesty, more simplicity, more useful work, and a greater wish to set forth on the great pilgrimage. This pilgrimage is not to Canterbury or Walsingham or Compostella or Rome; it is a pilgrimage to Truth, the saint whom men so regularly disregard.

"Knowest thou a holy saint Canst thou tell us of the way

"God bless me, nay,"
"Never saw I palmer
That asked after Truth

that men call Truth? where that saint dwelleth?"

quoth this fellow then. with pike-staff and with scrip, till ye now in this place."

Instead of seeking Truth, men seek money; instead of honouring Love, they honour Wrath; instead of dealing honestly, they bow down before Pride, Flattery, Bribery, Corruption, and Jobbery, branded under the title of Lady Meed, who is the thin disguise of Alice Perrers, the infamous mistress of Edward III. Kings are weak, barons are cats that seize and poss about the people of the realm, knights are idle hunters, lawyers are thieves; monks and nuns are no better than they should be, merchants are swindlers, bankers are coin-clippers, and all the wonderful array of papal officers and English churchmen are mere plunderers of the land, pocket-fillers, and cheaters of the people. As for Friars, "there was one good Friar, in the days of Francis, but that was long ago." Neither Wit nor Learning, Scripture nor Imagination, helps the seeker one

jot in his pilgrimage; words, words, words, are the end of them. The working man, God save the mark, is an idler, a drinker, a spoil-work, a wastrel, a loafer, and an unemployable; the professional beggar, with limbs professionally broken for his trade, is no worse than he; and ruffling Regulars, covetous lords, cheating shopmen, idle priests, lying pilgrims, and fine-furred harlots, jostle one another in the chaos of the scene. Through all, warning all, and at times tearing and punishing all, stalk the shadow forms of Plague and Storm and Famine, regularly visiting England, God's messengers to the generation that have clean forgotten Him; and though Piers Plowman may go down to Hell and fetch Humanity from Satan's grip, yet there rises the dread shape of Antichrist and sweeps that sweet and gentle figure from the scene; "and it was night."

This is the first impression that one gets of the book known as Piers Plowman: but it is a first impression only. Another reading shows another side. Kings may be weak, but they are resolved to deal sharply with Lady Meed. Reason and Conscience have by no means left the land; they plead passionately for the punishment of Wrong (the king's officer). Barons and knights are not all wicked; they can rule far better than the people could who would try their hand at government; and it is they who will, when the time comes, bring the Church to the bar of judgment. Gentlemen are willing and even anxious, though almost impotent, to help against the disorders of the day: some lawyers here and there will plead for God's poor and take no fee for it; some monks and nuns stay in their convents, some hermits in their cells, and there they work or pray; some honesty is still left in trade; and a bishop here and there knows his business, and parish priests here and there do not skip away to London, but stay in their parishes and comfort and feed their people. Unity and Peace and Conscience and Charity never cease to do their work in the human heart, and they raise the banner of the Christ in the field of Armageddon. The working man, the real. true, leal, honest, uncomplaining, working man, is up early and hard at work for very few pence; the cottage woman holds her head up and "puts a good face on it; "some of the beggars are Christ's poor who can perforce do nothing but lie as Lazarus did at Dives' door: and in the mob that fill

the Malvern plain, stretching to Worcester roofs, are honest traders, good ancres, and a stray woman of the streets, eager for the great pilgrimage. Through all. warning all, encouraging all, comes at length, though foreshadowed throughout the former scenes, an ordinary man, PIERS PLOWMAN, the people's man, the people's Christ, poor humanity adorned with love, hardworking humanity armed with indignation, sympathetic humanity clad in the intelligence that knows all and-makes allowances; at one time setting high-born ladies to work, at another passionately attacking the insolent priest, at another calling upon Famine to help him against the loafing, growling wastrel of the streets; but always encouraging the penitent sinful. helping the weak, leading the way in the great journey; a strange figure. Christ in humanity, humanity Christclothed, neither all a poor man, nor all a ploughman, nor all a Jesus, but fading and vanishing and reappearing in all forms of his humanised divinity, and ending as the Christ conqueror that from the Cross went down and burst the doors and defied the brazen guns of hell, and brought Piers Plowmans Fruit home with victory; yet, even in this majestic battle with Lucifer and Belial, Ragamuffin and Goblin, no omnipotent God far removed from the cares and sorrows of fourteenth-century England, but-

One like the Good Samaritan
Barefoot, bootless,
Riding on an asses back,
Like one that cometh to be dubbèd knight,
To get him his gilt spurs

and somewh
without spu
brightly he lightly
and his slasi

and somewhat like Piers Plowman, without spur or spear, brightly he looked ed knight, and his slashed shoon.

This is the general picture of the poem, or of such parts as are here wholly or partly transcribed.

The teaching of the book is negative in that, in face of the tremendous issues, it counsels no opposition to King, Church, Barons, or Knights. It is not inflammatory; it is no harbinger of the Reformation, though it contains a startling prophecy of that great event. It cannot be looked upon as anti-papal, though it was written in the time of the Great Schism; it distinctly disbelieves in the extremes of what the modern world calls democracy, although moral collectivism is its watchword; and it nowhere gives any support to the notion that it foresaw the coming of the great revolt of 1381, or approved of that revolt when it

came. It seems, notwithstanding a few political allusions, to be as remote from politics as are the Gospels themselves, and for the same reason. No form of government, it would say, is in itself bad, if men have the religious spirit; every form of government is bad if they have it not.

On the other hand, the teaching of the book is positive enough, in that it puts its finger on the abuses of the time, lawlessness, falseness, dishonesty, jobbery, money-grubbing, luxury, and idleness. Idleness of all things it cannot away with; the idle rich are scourged as much as the idle poor; idleness, with all its accompanying evils—begging, gluttony, dishonourable dealing, simony, neglect of plain duty, luxury senseless and unbridled, idleness is the unpardonable sin; and Professor Minto has sketched a curious parallel between this poem and the teaching of Thomas Carlyle, who possibly never had the book in his hands. If the undecided king is the victim of his circumstances, the wasters among the rich are what they are because they have not enough true work to do. The same may be said of the unworthy prelate—he does not do his true work. It may equally be said of pardoner, merchant, knight, lady, hermit, pilgrim, huckster and hewer, ditcher and delver. (who stands confusedly for God the Father) rules that each man should have his work and do it well: and the heaviest condemnation of Truth is for those in all ranks of life who instead of working go a-hunting or sit by the road and sing "Hey Trolly Lolly" and "God save you, Lady Em." Piers Plowman himself preaches work; he puts his mittens on and hangs a basket round his neck, a mock pilgrim, and off he goes to plough his half-acre. Indeed, the motto of the poem might be Each Man must Plough his Half-Acre; but it must be ploughed without the thought of selfenrichment at the cost of others. Work is not enough: Pride and Flattery work, traitors work, lechers work, disers and minstrels work, thieves work. Liar works for the Friars, the Friars themselves work, merchants and their 'prentices work, the Pardoner works hard—they are all Judas children. It is not enough to work; a man must work honestly for himself and for his fellows; he must work for his religion, for his king, and for his country.

In the humorous section dealing with his own life, the writer condemns himself for idleness; and we in our day

should say he condemns himself with justice. His definite teaching is that of the Gospel, "The poor ye have always with you: more shame to you. Your rich England should have no poor: it is your bounden duty to rid the world of the miserably poor, and you can do it if you will, by making all work for all." "The poor ye shall have always with you" is a text he never refers to, because he knows that he cannot find it in the Gospels. No autocrat can be more severe than he upon those who will not work. He has one word for the able-bodied loafer, and one alone: "Starve him;" and he knows that such an heroic remedy had not been tried in his own day, any more than it has been tried since.

Along with this gospel of true work for self and others, for home and country, is his definite preaching of home sympathy. England for England is his cry throughout the poem. He hates to see the Pope meddle in the appointment of foreigners to livings that have not fallen vacant; he hates to see men carry good English money to Avignon or Rome; he hates to see men make pilgrimages to St. James and St. Peter, when the pilgrimages they should make are to jails and hospitals, and to their poorer neighbours cottages. If Englishmen go to Sinai and Bethlehem to seek the saints, for Gods sake let them stay there, he says; we want no such pilgrims here. You can find your true pilgrimage by going the round of your own parish.

Again, he is definite enough, as we should expect, in his demand for a clean life. The King has his Alice Perrers: she must go; the bishops have their lemans, the hermits and pilgrims their girls; the beggars breed like rabbits, and are never married. Luxury, lust, and lechery spell the same thing for him, and with unnecessary wealth comes unnecessary wantonness. In passage after passage he declaims against the fatal gift of Constantine and legacies to the Church: religion goes a-hunting with a pack of hounds at his tail, and with this wealth in money and lands comes the ill life, the life of wantonness. Stained windows and gorgeous churches, fine vestments and full church pockets. are as much anathema to him as are the evil deeds of Richard II. and of the king's officers who pay the poor in receipts instead of in money, and who rob the honest worker of his horse, of his wife's honour, and his maid's innocence.

He pleads too for a saner education and for wholesome correction. The working man is told to go and get two sticks and beat his idle wife; another is blamed because his wife's bonnet costs three pounds and his own cost five shillings. The gentleman cockers his children because he is afraid of their catching the plague; he never takes a stick to them. "Spare the switch and spill the son" is to him a maxim equally true if it be applied to idler, wife, thief, beggar, or child. He praises the good school, and laments that not enough money is spent in what we should call scholarships.

Finally, he devoutly prays that the Church will reform herself, and prophesies that if she will not do so the king and the barons will reform her in a way she will not like: and for the idler he begs that Famine will return to England, for only in the sharp correction of drought and hunger will England learn her lesson. That she will learn it finally he cannot hope; for after Calvary comes Antichrist, and Pride and Flattery regain their places; and with this his indignant spirit passes sadly into the dark.

No one can quite tell how far the author represents the true picture of his time. He is in general agreement with Chaucer, who was as earnest as he: any one will see this who cares to look below the surface of the Canterbury Tales. It is the custom to say Chaucer is the poet of the rich and Langland of the poor; that Chaucer laughed at and tolerated with Horatian sang-froid the foibles, the vices, and even the miseries of his day. Nothing, to my mind, can be further from the truth; and the plain fact is that while Langland is sardonic, indignant, fierce, you never know when you turn a page of Chaucer how near you are to tears; and it must be remembered by those who consider Chaucer an aristocrat and Langland a democrat, that Chaucers poems include the figures of the Parson, Janicula, Griselda, the old man of the Pardoners Tale, and the numberless pictures of the good and charitable rich.

The questions that surround this poem as a text are most difficult. The reader may be referred to Professor Skeats monumental edition, of which it is needless to say I have made the fullest use; to Professor Manlys chapter in the second volume of the Cambridge History of English Literature; to Jusserands beautiful and loving studies of the

poem; and to the bibliography given in the Cambridge History. Any one, however, who would feel the poem as it ought to be felt must have in his hands, if only for an hour, two books, first a black letter copy of the poem which in these days of reprints cries aloud for publicity, and secondly the volume in which Bishop Stubbs in a fine spirit of recognition has written of our author, Christ in English Literature.

We do not know for certain what was the original form of the poem; nor do we know when, how, or with what object the great additions to this form were made. The criterion of allusion will not fully serve as a means for settling dates: for when a work written before the days of printing is being, through forty years or more, constantly altered, contemporary allusion may creep in at any time. The utmost that can, at the present moment, be asserted without fear of contradiction is that the poem was written between 1360 and 1400; that it was constantly and in many cases carelessly revised, and large additions were made; that it was known well in some form by 1381, when a part at least of its teaching and the name of its central figure, Piers Plowman, were made free use of by the leaders of the mob which broke into London, hung the archbishop, killed the lawyers, and dragged the Flemings out of the churches to butcher them in the streets, and that traditionally it has thus been, most unfairly, regarded as the herald and literary expression of that mysterious, illtimed, and unsuccessful movement. The reader will do well to bear in mind that though the temptation to enlarge upon such an unprecedented event as the sack of part of London must have been great, there is no word in the latest recension of this poem to describe, praise or condemn the movement of Wat Tyler, John Straw, or the Rev. John Ball. Most editors explain this allusion-silence of the last recension by saying the poet was afraid, in consequence of the reaction following, to refer to the uprising of the people; I would rather see in his abjuration of revolt, in his failure to describe the revolt, a continuation of the attitude always adopted by him, that what England needed was a change of heart and not an exchange of purses. The hateful relapses into savagery which marked the Jacquerie, the French Revolution, and the lynching states of to-day

would be to him the negation of the spirit of Piers Plowman, and the throwing away of all that men of all classes have laboriously acquired in the domain of legislation, self-government, and self-control. Thus I hold, while admiring greatly the historical novel called *Long Will*, that the talented authoress, Miss Florence Converse, has erred in her interpretation of the part played by the author and his poem in the troublesome days and awful scenes which marked the year 1381.

And if one is uncertain about the exact date of composition, we are still more in doubt as to the authorship. The poem is attributed variously to Robert or William Langland of Cleobury Mortimer and to William Langley; but no outside allusion of any importance save that of tradition tells us who the writer was. We gather his biography, if it can so be called, from his work. The humorous description of himself occurring only in one text may have been added at any date and by any chantry priest or other person, and it is impossible to say what he means by it; and this section, the fable of the rats, the long additions which follow Gods bull of pardon, and the interludes of the Harrowing of Hell and the Coming of Antichrist, seem to the present editor to point to the composite character of the authorship, a composite character strongly maintained by Professor Manly and denied by Jusserand. It is often forgotten that when a poem dealing with social miseries is produced it may be made a vehicle to represent the feelings and aspirations of thousands more than the author; and that when in addition it becomes popular and is written in an easily imitable form, many hands, authorised and unauthorised, set to work to help. alter, continue, strengthen, weaken, and enlarge. One thinks instinctively of the Book of Psalms, the prophecies of Isaiah, the plays of Shakespeare, the Sonnets of Shakespeare, the Wiclif Bible, the Anglo-Saxon Gospels, the Iliad and the Odyssey, all of which were (and some of which are still) assigned to one individual author or editor. though criticism has in nearly every case disputed the absolute claims set up for David, Isaiah, Shakespeare, Wiclif, Alfred, and Homer respectively. Such a composite authorship, I think, is the only thing that will account for the almost senseless "improvements" which we continually meet with in the latest text: and I believe that a careful comparative study of the texts themselves will do more to clear up difficulties than any reasoning from history or allusion. Such study the poem has not yet received. The metre and dialect have received fullest attention; but they yield more information about the scribes than about the author. Yet the scribes themselves may have been the chief offenders.

If we try to reconstruct from a careful reading what manner of man or men penned these visions, we might arrive at some picture like the following. They were or he was a man who loved the country for its birds and flowers. but loved London better for its people; who had been to school and read and remembered eagerly and lovingly, with greater intelligence than care, the Latin Bible and the Latin Fathers; who lived a precarious, poor, tramping life of mass or chantry priest, earning little and continually consorting, partly by choice and partly by necessity, in the most intimate way, with friars, theologians, merchants, pilgrims, beggars, drunkards, loose women, and with the honest and hard-working poor; who knew all the tricks of shop and cheaping, of mendicancy and mendacity; who was not averse from honest idleness, and who was stung to penitence and indignation by what he saw, heard, and felt in himself and in those around him; who hated the trickery, the aristocracy, and introcacies of law which he did not understand, and who loved the scenes in the gentleman's dining-hall and in the taverns, where he was quite at home: who abhorred—perhaps with envy—the easy life of the rich noble and the fat priest; who by his reading, his monastic training, and his own poverty imagined that the saviour of society would come from and belong to the only class he thoroughly understood; who wrote roughly the rough alliterative verse, indigenous to the land and very pedestrian, but who in his inspired hours, which were many, almost rose, notwithstanding his awkward tools, to the spiritual heights of Bunyan and Shelley and to the poetic heights of the Old Testament prophets. Like Bunyan and Shelley, he lived in stormy times; like them, he had, as an individual, been through some of the moral cataclysms of which he spoke; like them, he was prone to fall, but ready to rise; but he did not use the nervous

beauty of Bunyans prose or the metaphysical wings of Shelleys scholarship, strengthened by his unearthly and Titanic force. This, however, was his advantage, for his work was capable of being enlarged and successfully imitated. For he wrote for the ordinary man, who, whether he be king or baron, bishop or pardoner, merchant or Lombard, hermit or pilgrim, knight or knave, may, if his heart counsel him, echo the last words:

And wend as wide To seek-Piers Plowman." "I will become a pilgrim, as the world lasteth

ARTHUR BURRELL.

ISLEWORTH, January 1, 1912.

USEFUL BOOKS

Professor Skeat's edition of Piers Plowman. 2 vols.

J. Jusserand, L'épopée Mystique (the book has been translated).

Professor Manly's chapter and bibliography in the Cambridge History of English Literature.

Black Letter editions of the Poem (British Museum).

Trevelyan's England in the Times of Wyclif.

Cutts' Scenes of the Middle Ages.

Florence Converse, historical novel, Long Will.

Riley's Illustrations of London Life from Original Documents.

Bishop Stubbs' Christ in English Literature.

Much interesting matter will be found in pamphlets and magazines. These can be identified s.v. Langland or Plowman, or in the bibliographies of Periodical Literature in the British Museum.

Piers the Plowman. Printed by R. Crowley, 1550; by Owen Rogers, 1561; Edited with notes, glossary, etc., by T. D. Whitaker, 1813; by T. Wright (with the Crede), 1842, 1856, 1895; by W. W. Skeat, E.E.T.S., 1867, etc.; with Richard the Redeless, 1873; for Clarendon Press Series, 1869, 6th ed., revised, 1891; three parallel texts, with Richard the Redeless, notes, glossary, etc. (Clarendon Press), 1886.

Parallel extracts from 29 MSS, of Piers the Plowman, W. W. Skeat, E.E.T.S., 1866; In Modern Prose, with introduction by K. Warren, 1895, 1899; by W. W. Skeat (King's Classics), 1905.

See J. M. Manly, Piers the Plowman and its Sequence, Cambridge History of Literature, vol. ii.; and E.E.T.S., 1908; and Jusserand, Piers the Plowman, the work of one or of five, 1909.

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To all who understand or would understand

PIERS PLOWMAN

3 saw myself, a youth, almost a boy, in a lowpitched wooden church. The slim war candles gleamed, spots of red, before the old pictures of the saints. There stood before me many people, all fair=baired peasant beads. From time to time they began swaying, falling, rising again, like the ripe ears of wheat when the wind in summer passes over them. All at once a man came up from behind and stood beside me. 3 did not turn towards bim, but 3 felt that the man was Christ. Emotion, curiosity, awe, overmastered me. 3 made an effort and looked at my neighbour. A face like everyones, a face like all mens faces. The eyes looked a little upward, quietly and intently: the lips closed, not compressed; the upper lip as it were resting on the other; a small beard parted in two; the bands folded and still; and the clothes on bim like everyones.

"What sort of Christ is this?" I thought. "Such an ordinary, ordinary man. It cannot be." I turned away, but I had bardly turned my eyes from this ordinary man when I felt again that it was really none other than Christ standing beside me. Sudedenly my beart sank and I came to myself. Only then I realised that just such a face is the face of Christ—a face like all mens faces.

Turgeniev.

3 wente forth wyde-where walkynge myn one In a wyde wyldernesse.

THE VISION OF THE FIELD FULL OF FOLK

PIERS PLOWMAN

THE VISION OF THE FIELD FULL OF FOLK 1

In a summer season, In rough cloth I robed me, In habit like a hermit And through the wide world I went, wonders to hear.

when soft was the sun, as I a shepherd were, in his works unholy,

But on a May morning, A marvel befel me I had wandered me weary, On a broad bank And as I lay and leaned I slumbered in a sleeping, And I dreamed—marvellously.

on Malvern hills, -sure from Faery it cameso weary, I rested me. by a merry-sounding burn; and looked into the waters it fippled so merrily,

All the worlds weal. Truth and trickery, All I saw, sleeping.

all the worlds woe, treason and guile,

I was in a wilderness, And eastward I looked I saw a Tower on an hill, Beneath it a Dell, With deep ditches and dark And Death and wicked spirits And all between,

wist I not where, against the sun. fairly fashioned, and in the Dell a dungeon, and dreadful to see, dwelt therein, between the Hill and Dungeon,

A FAIR FIELD

FULL OF FOLK

¹ Readers are referred to the Comment (p. 179) and to the Index for further explanatory matter regarding the poem.

Piers Plowman

Rich and poor, Working and wandering

4

Some were for ploughing,
Set their seed and sowed their
seed,
To win what wastrels

Some were for pride,

Some were for prayers and penance,
Living strait lives
In hope of heavenly bliss,
Anchorites, hermits,
And coveted not to roam
Nor with dainty living

Some chose merchandise;

And some were for music, Gold getting, gleeful,

But jesters and janglers, Feigning their fancies, With wit enough to work, Paul preacheth about them be that speaketh filthily

There were tramps and beggars Crammed with bread Lying for their food, Going to bed in gluttony, Gangs of mean thieves. Sleep and sorry sloth

Pilgrims and palmers

all manner of men, as in the world we must.

and played full seldom,

and sweated hard, with gluttony destroy.

in parade of apparel.

ay, many a one, for love of our Lord

that held in their cells, the country side and beg, their body to please.

they throve the best.

the music of minstrels, in an innocent heart.

Judas children, and fooling the crowds, if work they would, —no more will I say is the Devils man.

fast about flitting, in wallet and belly, and fighting in the taverns, rising from bed in ribaldry,

pursue them ever.

plighted together,

To seek S. James in Spain, They went upon their way And had leave to lie I saw some of them,

Each told a different tale Their tongues tuned to lying,

Hermits, a heap of them, Were walking to Walsingham

Great long lubbers, Clad in copes To pass for hermits,

Friars? All the four orders, Preaching to the people, For their own profit.

Many of these masters Money and their preaching Gods love has turned trader, And we in few years If Gods love and the Church The greatest mischief in the world

Look there, a Pardoner, A papal bull he brought, He can assoil them all,

The simple fools believed him, loved his words, Came and knelt He bunched his "letters" in their faces And his parchment roll robbed them

and S. Peter in Rome: with many a wise tale, all their life after. O, they had gone the pilgrimage, -every one a lieand not to truth.

with hooked staves, -each had his wench with him-that loth were to work, to be known for hermits, and have an easy life.

I found them there, and glosing the gospel

may dress as they will, soon meet one another. and the rich pay high, have seen wonderful things. do not cut down such Friars,

will mount up full fast.

preaching like a priest, sealed by the bishop, of fasting, falsehood, and of broken vows.

and kissed his bull, and blinded their eyes,

of rings and brooches.

Thus, men, ye give your gold to keep gluttons going, And lend it to loafers

If the bishop were holy He would not send his seal But against the bishop For the parson and the Pardoner Which the parish poor would get

Some parish priests The parish was poor Praying for licence And sing masses for souls

Eishops and deacons, With cures under Christ Who ought to shrive their people They lie in London,

Some serve the king, In the Court of Chancery, They claim his debts,

Conscience accused them, "Ye suffer idolatry

"And bring your iron-bound boxes

"Many a wax candle hangs

"But all the world knows well,

"It profiteth your purses

"That men should live and die

"And all the world is worse

that follow lechery.

and worth both his ears, to deceive the people, your Pardoner preaches not,

share the sermon-silver,

if the Pardoner were away.

complained to the bishop, since the Great Pestilence, in London to dwell, for silver is sweet.

masters and doctors, and tonsured to show it,

and pray and feed their flocks, in Lent, ay, all the year;

collecting his moneys, in the wards and ward-motes, his dues of waifs and strays.

and the commons heard it, in many sundry places,

to take the untrue tolls. as record of a miracle, that miracle is none. and ye prelates suffer it and believe-in their ignorance. for this your covetise."

(The writer digresses)

What trouble and mischance Through two false priests, They were discomfited And for Eli saw them sin And chastened them not As it was prophesied, And Elis sons were slain. From his chair where he sat And brake his neck a-two. All this was Gods vengeance, And, since they were priests God was the angrier

fell on free Israel,
Ophni and Phineas.
and lost the ark of God,
and suffered their evil,
and would not rebuke them,
—the ark of God was lost,

he fell, for sorrow

he beat not his children, and men of Holy Church, and sooner took his vengeance.

Therefore ye priests and Churchmen
Ye who should their fathers be God shall take vengeance,
Than ever on Eli,
For your wicked tolerance,
Your mass and your mattins
Are done undevoutly;
Christ in his consistory

who let men worship idols, and teach them better, harder and greater on Ophni and on Phineas, and your own sins. and many of your Hours I dread me at the last will curse many of you.

I know well the power that
To bind and unbind, as the
He left the power, with love, to the
Cardinal virtues, for the
Heavens gates, where Christ dwelleth.

that Peter had to keep, as the Book telleth. to the four virtues for they close the gates, lleth

Heavens gates, where Christ dwelle
But of court cardinals ta
Presuming of themselves a
And holding the power th
I will not deny it them, fo
Lieth the great election of a Pope.

taking the name of cardinal, a Pope to make, that Peter had, for in love and learning

"Speak not against it," saith Conscience,

" for Holy Church sake."

Piers Plowman

(The narrative proceeds)

Then came a king The power of the people

Then came Common Sense

That Sense and Common knighthood Should see that the people

With Common Sense the people contrived every craft, And for profit of all men To till and work, To live their day with loyal work

Then looked up a lean lunatic "Christ keep thee, sir king, "And grant thee so to rule, "And thou, for thy righteous rule,

Then bent an angel down, Who cannot jangle in the courts But they must serve and suffer, He spake to the clergy and the king.

- "Tking and a Prince art thou.
- "To=morrow nothing:
- "Thou that of Christ the King
- "Dost keep the way,
- "Be just, show mercy,
- "And carry out His will.
- "Mercy is justice still,
- "Sow and reap mercy."

Then rose a buffoon, a glutton of words It the King keep not the Law be is the name—but not the thing.

knighthood went before him, made him to reign.

and made clerks and learned men

and the king together, might gain a living.

set apart plowmen, as true life asketh,

while life and land remain.

and knelt and said, thee and thy kingdom, that loyalty may love thee

find thy reward in heaven.

and spake for the poors sake, and plead their cause aright, for their sakes he said it.

And all the people cried The precepts of the King These be our bond of law. to the Council in Latin

Then ran a rout of rats
And came to a council
For a Court Cat
Leapt among them lightly,
Perilously played with them
"We dare not look up," said
they,

- "And if we grumble at his games
- "Scratch us and claw us
- "We loathe our life
- " If we with any wit
- "We might be lords on earth

A rat of renown Told them a sovran cure.

- "I have seen great dogs
- "Wearing collars, bright gold,
- "Necklaces of crafty work.
- "Uncoupled they wend,
- "Were a bell on the collar
- "Therefore," the rat says,
- "We should buy a brass bell
- "And set it on a collar
- " And hang it on the cats neck.
- "When he rides, when he rests,
- "And if he list to play
- "And appear in his presence
- "And if he be wroth,

All this rout of rats
But when the bell was bought

and small mice with them, for profit of them all. came when he would caught them as he would, and possed them about.

"for dread of divers fears,

he will grieve us all, and take us in his paws. until he let us be. his power might withstand, and live as we would."

ready of tongue

in cities and in towns
all about their necks,
They go where they will,
through warren and waste;
men might know them—and
run.

"reason showeth me or of bright silver, for profit of us all, Then can we hear or when he runs to play. then we may look while he will play. beware and shun his paths."

to this reason assented, and on a collar hung,

Was no rat in the rout. That durst have bound the bell And they held themselves cowards

And their labour lost.

A mouse that knew much

- "Though we kill the Cat
- "To snatch us and our kind,
- "Therefore my counsel is,
- "And be never so bold
- "For I heard my sire say,
- "Where the cat is a kitten
- " Holy Writ witnesseth.

- "For me," quoth the mouse,
- "Never shall cat or kitten
- "Nor should men prate of collars.
- "For though it cost me dear,
- " And suffer the Cat
- " Mischief that chastens many
- "Were the Cat and his kittens
- "We mice would eat up
- "Ye rats would waken men that rest; " If ye had your will

What this rat-dream meaneth Divine it-I dare not-

There wandered a hundred, Serjeants they seemed, Pleading the Law, Unlocking their lips never Thou mightest better mete the mist

Than get a mutter from their mouths—save thou show thy money.

for all the realm of France about the cats neck.

and their counsel feeble

stood forth and said: yet another should come though we crept under benches. LET THE CAT BE, to show him the bell, seven years ago, the Court is full ailing

Who to thee thou land whose king is a child.—Solomon.

"I see so much to come by my counsel be hurt

I would never buy collar I would hold my counsel to do as he will. will teach the Cat better. not ready to spring on us, many a mans malt,

yourselves ye could not rule." ye merry men, by dear God in heaven.

in hoods of silk, and served at the Bar, for pennies and for pounds, for love of our Lord.

on Malvern hills

I saw bold bishops Made clerks of accounts Deacons and archdeacons, Who should preach to the people They leapt away to London be clerks of the Kings Bench

Yet I dreamed more, Barons and burgesses, I saw in this assembly, Many a butcher, baker, brewer, tailors and tinkers, Woolweavers, linenweavers, Masons and miners Ditchers and delvers, And spend the livelong day in song, Cooks and their men were crying, "Pies hot, all hot, "Good pork, good goose; Taverners told the same tale, "White wine, red wine,

All this I saw sleeping,

and bachelors of divinity to serve the king, men full of dignity,

and feed the poor, (their bishops gave them leave)

and to despoil the land.

of mean men and of rich, bondmen of villages; as ye shall hear after, toll-takers in the markets, and many another craft, that do their work ill,

"God save you, Lady Em." Come, come and dine." "A drink of wine for nothing, to wash the roast meat down."

nay, seven times more.

THE VISION OF HOLY CHURCH

THE VISION OF HOLY CHURCH

What this mountain meaneth And the FIELD FULL OF FOLK

A lady lovely to look on, Came from that castle down;

"Will, sleepest thou?" she cried, "Seest thou this people,

"How busy they be

"The greater part

" Have their heaven here,

"Of other heaven but this

I was afeard of her face, "My lady," said I,

"The Tower on the hill,

"O would that ye wrought

"He is Faiths father,

"He gave you five senses

"Therefore he biddeth earth

"With wool, with linen,

"In moderate measure

"He of his courtesy

"Things three, no more;

"The one is clothing,

"The one is meat,

"The third is drink when thou driest

"Lest thou be the worse

"Lot in his lifeday

"Wickedly wrought

and the dark dale

fairly I shall show.

all in linen clad,

in the medley and the maze? that pass upon this earth they wish no other; keep they no reckoning."

fair though she was; "what meaneth it all?"

Truth liveth therein, as his word teacheth you. he formed you all; wherewith to serve him. to help you each one with needful livelihood, that ye may be at ease. set for common use but three are needful. to save thee from chill, for thy health sake,

but none out of reason when thou shouldst work.

did a lecherous deed, and wrathed God Almighty, "And all that wicked deed Through wine and women

"Dread the delight of drink

"Though thou long for more,

"What the belly asketh

"What the soul loveth

"Trust not thy body,

"The lying wretched world

"The Fiend and thy flesh

"This one and that

"And whisper evil to thy heart.

" My lady, thanks," quoth I,

"But tell me, my lady,

"That men so closely love,

"Go to the Gospel,

"When with a penny

"Should they with the penny

" And God them asked

" And the image also

"' Of Cæsar,' said they,

"' Render to Cæsar,' quoth he,

"' And what is Gods to God:

"Right fully reason

"And Common Sense your warden be

"To be banker of your treasure

"Reason, Thrift and Common Sense

Then I would know of her,

"The deep dark vale

"Beseech thee, my lady,

he laid—on wine; was Lot snared. and thou shalt do the better. Measure is Medicine. is not all good for the ghost, is not all food for the body.

a liar is his teacher, that would thee betray, follow hard after thee, pursue thy soul,

Therefore, beware."

"thy teaching I like well, of the money of this world to whom belongeth it?"

hear what God said, they posed him in the Temple, honour King Cæsar? of whom the letters spake that stood upon the coin. 'we know that well enough.' 'that that Cæsars is, else ye do ill.'

should rule you all,

your wealth to keep, and give it you at need.

all go together."

for His sake that made her, so dreadful to see, what may this mean?"

- "Care Castle," said she,
- " May curse that he was born
- "Therein one dwelleth,
- "Father of falseness,
- "He egged to evil
- "IIe counselled Cain
- "He cheated Judas
- "And hung him on the elder tree.
- "He is a love-hinderer,
- "Who trust in earthly treasure,

"he that cometh therein a body and a soul; whose name is Wrong, he framed it himself; Adam and Eve, to kill his brother, with Jewish silver, ree.

he lieth to all where Truth is not."

Then I wondered in my wit
That such wise words
And by the High Name I asked
Who she was certainly

what woman she might be, from Holy Writ showed me, to tell me ere she went, that counselled me, that taught me.

"Holy Church am I," quoth she,

"I took thee in my arms first

"To me thou broughtest sureties

"All thy life long

"thou oughtest me to know. I made thee free.

to do all my bidding to love me, to believe me."

Then I kneeled down
And prayed her piteously
And eek to teach me kindly
That I might work His will
"Teach me no treasure-gaining

"Thou that art called a saint,

and cried her grace, to pray for my sins, on Christ to believe, who made me man: but tell me this, how may I save my soul?"

- "When all treasures are tried,
- "GOD IS LOVE.
- "It is as dear a treasure
- "This tells thee Truth.
- "For he who is True with his tongue,

TRUTH IS THE BEST. To this text I appeal. as dear God himself;

True with his hands,

"Working True works therewith,

"He is a god, the gospel says,

"And by S. Lukes words

"The learned know it

"For Christians and un-Christians

"Kings and knights

"Righteously roaming

"Taking transgressors,

"Till Truth determine

"David in his day

"And made them swear on the sword

"That is the plain profession

" And not to fast on Friday

"But to serve him or her

" And never to leave them

"The knight that doth it not

"His duty is not to fast

"But faithfully defend

"When God began heaven

"He made knights in his courts,

"Cherubim, Seraphim,

"Lucifer loveliest,

"He was an archangel,

"But he brake his obedience

"And from that fellowship,

"Fell to deep hell

" More thousands with him

"Leapt with Lucifer

"For they believed him and his lying words:

For they believed fillit and his typing words.

and wishing ill to none, in earth and heaven, like to our Lord. and should teach it everywhere,

claim to be taught the Truth.

should keep the Truth, the realm around, tying them fast, their trespass to the end. dubbed his knights

to serve Truth ever; belonging unto knights, for a hundred years, that asketh for the Truth, for money or for favour. is traitor to his order; and not to doff his shirt, and fight for Truth.

in the great bliss of it, creatures ten, seven more and one other, next to our Lord. one of Gods knights, and lost his bliss, in a Fiends likeness, to dwell evermore. than man could number in loathly form

3 shall sit in the sides of the north: like 3 shall be to the Highest."

(The writer speaks)

Lord, why should he then Leap to the north Were it not for northern folk But I blame none. Safer by far is it

where the sun reigneth.

the wretched Lucifer

I could you tell

and abide not in the sun?

And where the fiend flew Where he in hell is And over against him—Christ. he failed and fell and he there bound

(The narrative proceeds)

"Then fell he and his fellows.

"Out of heaven into hell

"Some in air are, some on earth,

" And all that work wrong

"Shall wend to him

"But they that work well,

"Eastward to heaven shall go,

"Where is the throne of Truth.

"Teach it to the simple

"TRUTH IS TREASURE

they turned to fiends, fast they hobbled,

some in deep hell, after their death-day and dwell with that shrew. as Holy Writ telleth, there to abide

the learned know it well, the best tried on earth."

"Nay, but I know not," quoth I,

" How doth Truth grow in me?

"ye must teach me better. is it beyond my ken?"

"Thou doted daff,

dull is thy wit,

"Little Latin hast thou learnt in the days of thy youth."

Whoe for my barren youth days spent in vain.

"Thou knowest, well enough. To love the Lord

"And rather than do deadly sin to die.

Better die than live ill.

"This is Truth, I trow,

"Suffer him to tell thee

whoso can teach thee better and learn his lesson;

- "Truth telleth thee that Love
- "A sovran salve
- "Love is the plant of Peace,
- "Heaven could not hold it,
- "Till it had of this earth
- "Then never lighter was a leaf
- "Than Love was when it took
- "Fluttering, piercing
- "No armour may it stay,
- "Therefore is Love the leader
- "And, as a mayor, a mediator
- "Right so Love shapes the
- "Love lays on man the payment due.
- "In thy hearts conscience,
- "In thy heart and in thy head
- "That was the Fathers deed,
- "And looked on us with love,
- "Meekly for our misdeeds.
- "And yet Christ willed no woe
- "With his meek mouth
- "For pity on the people
- "Therefore I counsel you, ye rich,
- "Though ye be mighty at the
- "The same measure ye mete,
- "Ye shall be weighed therewith
- "Though thou be true tongued,
- "And be innocent as a wean
- "Save thou love loyally,

is the treacle of sin, for body and soul. most precious of the virtues, so heavy was Love, eaten its fill;

upon a linden tree, the flesh and blood of man. as a needles point, nor no high walls.

of the Lords folk in heaven between the king and people.

on man for his misdeeds,

in the deep well of thee, the mighty Truth is born; that formed us all, and let his Son die

on them that wrought him, pain, he prayed for mercy, that pained him to his death.

have pity on the poor,

be ye meek in your deeds; wrong or right,

when ye go hence.

though thou trade honestly, that weepeth at its christening, and lend to the poor,

- "And share with him in godly wise
- "Your Masses and your Hours
- "Than slut Malkyns maidenhead
- " James the gentle
- "Faith without fact
- "As dead as a door-tree Faith without works is dead.

Gods gifts to thee, bring you no more merit

that none desireth.

said in his writings, is nothing worth, unless deeds follow.

- "Chastity without charity
- "It is but as an unlighted lamp.
- " Many chaplains are chaste,
- "There are no harder, hungrier men
- " None more avarous than they
- "Unkind to kinsmen
- "They eat up their 'charity'
- "Many parish priests
- "But, cumbered with covetise,
- "So close hath avarice
- "Avarice is no virtue,
- "It teaches the lay people
- "Therefore in the gospel

- "Love is the leech of life,
- "It is the graft of grace,

lies chained in hell,

but where is their charity?

than men of Holy Church, when they are set on high, and to all Christian souls, and grumble for more.

are clean in body, they cannot drive it forth, clasped them together, it is hell treachery, ungenerously to give, these words be written, Give and it shall be given to you; I gave you all.

- "This is the key of love,
- "To comfort the sorrowful

- it openeth Gods grace, that are with sin entangled. next to our Lord, is the nearest road to
- "Therefore I say to thee,
- "All treasures tried,
- "Love it," quoth she,
- "Learning thee what Love is,"
- TRUTH IS THE BEST: "no longer may I stay

heaven.

and with that she left me.

THE VISION OF LADY MEED AND OF HER MARRIAGE TO FALSEHOOD

THE VISION OF LADY MEED

YET kneeled I on my knees,

- "Mercy, my lady,
- "That bare the blissful Child,
- "By some craft teach me

"Look on thy left hand,

"Falsehood and Flattery,

I looked on my left hand, And was ware of a woman, Her robe fur-edged, Crowned with a crown, Fairly her fingers And in the rings red rubies, And diamonds of dearest price, Sapphires and beryls

Her rich robe Her ribbons set with gold, Her array ravished me; I wondered who she was,

"What is this woman," said I,

Quoth she, "That is Meed the maid; "She hath slandered my love "And belied her to lords

"In the Popes palace,

and cried her grace, for Marys love of heaven, who bought us on the Rood, to know the False."

lo, where he standeth, and many of their friends."

as the Lady told me, wonderly clad, the finest on earth, the king hath no better, were fretted with rings, as red as a furnace, and double sapphires, poison to destroy.

of scarlet dye, red gold, rare stones; such riches saw I never: and whose wife she were.

"so wonderly clad?"

she oft hath harmed me, that is named Loyalty, that have the laws to keep. she is private as I,

"But Truth would not have it so,

"Falsehood her father is

"That, since he came to earth,

"And Meed is mannered after him,

for Meed is a bastard, with fickle tongue, never said sooth,

as nature will.

Like father, like son: Every good tree maketh good fruits.

"I should be higher than she,

"My father, the Great God,

"One God without beginning,

"He gave me Mercy

"Any man that is merciful

"Shall be my lord and I his love

"And he that taketh Meed to wife,

"Shall lose for love of her

"How speaketh David King

"And of men on the earth

"And of the way to safety?

of better stock I came, ground of all grace, and I his good daughter. that I might marry him. and loves me true

in the high heaven;

I wager my head, a heap of Gods charity. of men that take Meed, who maintain the truth, The Psalter beareth witness:

Lord, who shall dwell in Thy tabernacle? etc.

"And now will Meed be wedded

"False Fickle-Tongue,

"Flattery with his fair speech

"And Liar brought it about,

"There shalt thou know

"That belong to the lordship

"Blame them not, let them be,

"Till Honesty punish;

' I leave thee to Christ,

"Be thou but good

Then my lady left me And dreaming I beheld all to a cursed shrew, begotten of a fiend. this people hath enchanted and to-morrow is the bridal. the small and the great of Flattery and Meed. keep thy tongue still, then say thy say. and his clean mother, and save thee from Covetise."

lying there asleep

THE MARRIAGE OF MEED

When she had gone from me All the rich retinue,
Were bidden to the bridal,
Knights, clerks and commons,
Sheriffs and sheriffs men,
Middlemen, brokers,
No reckoning the rout

I looked and beheld whose root is false-living, poor and rich, jurymen and summoners, beadles and bailiffs, victuallers, pleaders; that ran at Meeds heels.

They sent Simony to seal the paper That Falsehood and Flattery for their fines. To make them over Meeds dowry for there was no hall nor house that could har And EVERY FIELD WAS FULL OF FOLK.

to seal the papers, for their fines held, Meeds dowry for ever. that could harbour the people,

On a mountain, in midst of it, at mid
They pitched a proud pavilion,
For knights from afar and for
For jurors, for summoners,
For the flattering Friars, all the
That all might witness what t
When Meed was married to Falsehood.

at mid-morning tide, and ten thousand tents, and for strange comers, for labourers on farms, all the Four Orders, what the writing said, schood

Simony, Law and Juryman But Flattery was the first To give her away When Simony and Lawyer They assented thereto were Meeds nearest friends, to fetch her from her bower, and join her to Falsehood. saw their desire, —at Silvers prayer.

Then leaped out Liar, "A char "That Guile with great oaths And Simony and Lawyer stood for Unfolding the deed that Fall Thus they began, and loud know all men by these presents . . . "Witness all men dwelling

"A charter, a charter, hath given them both." stood forth both of them that Falsehood had writ; and loud they cried:

dwelling on the earth,

- " Meed is here married,
- "But-for her goods.
- "Falsehood loveth her,
- "Flattery Fickle-speech
- "To be princes in pride,
- "To backbite, to boast,
- "To scorn men, to scold men,
- "To be bold to disobey,
- "With the kingdom of Covetise
- "With the island of Usury,
- "Gluttony and Oaths
- "To serve the devil
- "I grant possession
- "Of the earldom of Envy
- "I grant them all.
- "Bargain and brokerage,
- "All that lordship of Lechery,
- "In its words, its works,
- "In its raiment, its longings,
- "When lust willeth,

Gluttony gave them, To drink the long day To jangle and jest,

To eat on fast-days,
And sit and sup
To breed like town swme
To wake in despair
"(They shall think they be lost,

- "To have and to hold
- "A home with the devil,
- "With all the appurtenance
- "To dwell in woe with Satan

not for virtue nor rank,

for he knoweth her riches, granteth the pair to despise poverty, to bear false witness,

to beget slanders, to break the Commandments, and all the coasts about, I crown these two. I give them as their own, with all delights and lusts. in Sloths service and the Castle of Strife;

and the borough of Theft, its length and breadth, its watching eyes, its idle thoughts, and flesh at last faileth."

and swore it with oaths, at divers taverns, and judge their fellow-Christians, to feast before the hour. till sleep came over them, to be slothful and sleek, with no will to do better:

this is the end of them;) and their heirs after them and be damned for ever, of purgatory and hell, while God is in heaven." In witness of this, Peter the Pardoner Bett the Bucks beadle, Mund the Miller, Dated—the Devil, Witness Parson Simony, Wrong signed first, of Crutched Friars, Reynold the reeve, and many another, this deed I seal, Lawyer agreeing.

(THEOLOGY PROTESTS)

Then answered Theology

- "Sorrow upon thee,
- " For Meed is a lady,
- "Though Falsehood her father was,
- "And save Amends consent
- "God granteth Meed to Truth,
- "Thou hast given her to Guile,
- "The text telleth not so;

The labourer is worthy of his Mecd.

and said to Lawyer: to bring about such wedding, daughter of Amends,

Amends was her mother, she may not be wedded.

God give thee sorrow, Truth knoweth sooth

"I, Theology, know

"Lying on the gridiron

"Looked up and cried to God,

"' For I, man, of thy mercy

"And since a man may in heaven

"It seemeth right on earth

how Laurence the Levite near unto death, 'Open heavens gates

'Open heavens gates, have deserved MEED:'

merit MEED of God to wed MEED to Truth.

" All by lies thou livest

"Simony and thou

"The lawyers and ye

"Ye shall abide it dear

"Well ye know, ye liars,

"That Falsehood is faithless

"Beelzebubs bastard,

" And might kiss the king

"Work ye by wisdom

and lecherous works.
shame Holy Church;
hurt the people;
by God that made me;
if your wits are worth aught,
and fickle in works,
and Meed a high-born maiden
as his cousin if she would.
and by common sense,

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"And lead her to London

" If any law will let them

" Ay, though any judges judge

"Yet beware of wedding them,

"And Conscience is with him

"If he find you at fault

" It shall at the last

To this Civil Law agreed Nor yet the lawyers

Then Flattery fetched florins, And bade Guile give To the lawyers in special, And bade him fee Falsewitness "He can win Meed over

When this gold was given great than To Falsehood and Flattery for their falsehood.

"Sure, sir, we shall not cease For we have mastered Meed

"She is ready to go

"To see if Law will join you two

Then was Falsehood merry
And every man summoned
And bid them be ready,
To wend with them to Westminster,

where law is given,
lie together;
she may be joined to Falsehood,
—Wise is the Truth;

and knoweth each one of you, and by falsehood holden, press sore on your souls."

but not Sir Simony,
—till silver had changed hands.

florins in heaps, gold all about, "that none of them fail us," with florins enow; and bring her to my will."

great thankings were made for their fair gifts, Falsehood. till Meed be thy wedded wife, by our merry talk. with a good will to London,

in joy for evermore." and Flattery blithe, in all shires about, poor and rich,

to witness this deed.

(THE JOURNEY TO WESTMINSTER)

Then looked they for horses Yet hacks had they none But Guile began to borrow to carry them thither, save hacks that were hired, from many a great lord, And Flattery brought out He set Meed on a sheriff, Falsehood on a juryman, Flattery on a flatterer,

The lawyers had no horses, For Simony and Civil Law And Simony and Civil swore And Provisors be apparelled foals of the best; shod all new, trotting softly, with fair trappings.

angry men were they, must needs go a foot; summoners should be saddled, in palfrey wise.

- "Deans and subdeans," quoth Civil,
- "Archdeacons, officials,
- "Saddle them with silver bribes
- "Adultery, divorce,
- "They shall carry the bishops
- "Paulines people shall serve me
- " Harness the Bishops officer,
- "And buy us victuals
- "And get from Liar a long cart
- "Friars and beggars

"come you together, and all you registrars,

to make sins the lighter, and the dark ways of usury. to do their visitations, to complain in the courts, he shall draw us in a cart, from his fines for fornication; to carry all the lot of them, that are running on their feet."

Thus Falsehood and Flattery
And Meed in the midst of all
I have no time to tell
Of many manner of men
Guile went ahead

True-talk looked well at Guile But spurred his palfrey, And came to the kings Court, And Conscience told the king. fared forth together, and all the household after. the rag-tag that followed them, that live upon earth; and guided them all.

and said but little, and passed them all, and told it Conscience,

"Now," says the king, "by Christ, "Falsehood or Flattery

if I can catch or any of their fellows, "I would wreak vengeance

"And hang them by the neck,

" Never in this world shall man

"But as the Law looketh on men

"Attach those traitors,"

"Tether Falsehood fast

"And roll off Guiles head,

" And bring Meed before me

"For Simony and Civil Law,
"For fear the Church be

harmed

" And if ye catch Liar

"Till he be set in the pillory

"Watch for them well,

Dread stood at the door And went and bade Falsehood flee

Falsehood for fear then And Guile hurried aghast But the merchants met him And shut him in their shops And dressed him as a 'prentice

Lightly Liar Lurking in by-ways, He was nowhere welcome Hooted everywhere,

But the Pardoners had pity
They washed him and wiped
him,
And sent him out on Sundays
To give pardons by the pound

on wretches that do so, and all that maintain them; go bail for any one,

shall sentence fall on all.

he commands a constable, in spite of all his gifts, let him go no further, in face of them all.

I send you to warn them

by them for ever. let him not scape, for all his prayers, let none evade thee."

and heard the kings judgment,

and all his fellows. flew to the friars, at thought of death, and made him stay with them, to show men their wares, to serve the people.

leapt away thence, lugged here and there, for his many tales, bad pack and go.

and pulled him in to them,

and wound him in a gown, with bishops seals to churches, to all people—for pence.

Then the doctors heard of this To come and stay with them,

and wrote Liar letters and study mens water.

Spicers spoke with him
For he was learned in their
craft
Minstrels and messengers
And maintained him half a
year

to look at their ware,

and knew many a gum. met Liar once,

and eleven days.

But Friars with their fair speech And coped him like a Friar,

fetched him off thence,
that none who came should
know him,
as often as he will,

Yet hath he leave to leap out And is welcome when he cometh

and oft with them dwelleth.

Simony and Civil Law

And put them in the Popes
hands

But Conscience accused them;

sent messages to Rome

But Conscience accused them;
"Sir King," says he,
"Thy kingdom through their avarice

and appealed against the king,

avarice will wholly change, "And Holy Church be harmed for ever."

"save clerks amend,

All fled for fear None durst abide And truth to tell,

And when she was attached

and flew to hiding places, save Meed the maid, she shook for fear, she wrung her hands and wept.

THE VISION OF LADY MEED TRIED BEFORE THE KING

THE VISION OF LADY MEED TRIED BEFORE THE KING

Now is Meed the maid, None other with her, Then the king called a clerk, To take her and set her at ease.

by bedels and bailiffs, brought before the king. his name I know not,

- "I will assay her,
- "What man upon earth
- " And if she doth wisely
- "I will forgive her this guilt, The clerk took Meed Mirth was made and minstrelsy Meed to please withal; They that dwell at Westminster

myself will question her, she loveth best, and followeth my will, so God help me." and led her to the chamber; all honour her.

Joyfully, gently, Where this beauty dwelt; Gat leave of the clerk " Mourn not, Meed,

"We will counsel the king,

"Thou shalt wed as thou wilt,

" For all that Conscience

"Might and mastery shall be thine

"With King, with Commons, and with Court." Meed thanked them mildly

A cup of gold, Or a ruby ring,

The least man of her crew

And with that they took their leave.

came the Justices they hurried to her bower, and offered her comfort: make thou no sorrow, we will shape thy path, and whom thou wilt, may plot or do.

and to do thine own pleasure and gave to each or a goblet of silver, or other rich gift; had a golden piece,

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Piers Plowman

Then came the Clerks to comfort her;

"Be blithe,

"To work thy will

we be thy men, while life endureth."

And Meed sweetly

"I will love you loyally,

" And get livings for you,

"And buy you benefices;

"And your names be called aloud

"If I love a clerk,

"I am well known,

"And cunning clerks that know me not

promised the same: and make lords of you, —while your silver lasteth ye shall be pluralists,

in the Bishops courts. no ignorance shall stay him, he shall go forward,

shall couch behind."

Then came a Confessor,
And whispered soft
"Though gentle and sime

"Though gentle and simple

"And Falsehood kept thee mistress

" For a load of wheats price

"And will be thy beadsman "Among clerks and knights gowned like a Friar, as though in shrift: have lain by thy side,

this forty year, I will assoil thee, and will do thine errands and Conscience defeat."

Then Meed kneeled to the man And shrove her of her sins, Told him a tale To be her beadsman for all her evil deeds, the shameless one; and gave him a guinea and her go-between.

And he assoiled her

"We have a window a-making,

"Wilt thou glaze the gable, Meed,

"Sure shall thy soul be

"At mass and at mattins

"In thine honour solemnly

of her sins, and said: 'twill cost us high,

and grave thy name thereon? to see heaven; we will sing for thy soul, as Sister of our Order."

Lovely she laughed and said:

- "If that I wist
- "I would not make or mend
- "I will be your friend, Friar,
- "While ye show love to lords
- " And blame not those ladies
- "'Tis but frailty of flesh
- "If one scape the slander,
- "'Tis but one of the seven sins,
- "Be merciful, Friar,
- "And I will cover your kirk,
- "I will whiten and glaze
- "I will paint the picture
- "Every wight shall see and say:

(The writer speaks to his generation)

But God defend all good folk
Or to write in church windows
For with your name is painted
God knoweth your conscience
And what you spend and what
you hoard

Lords, leave such work
Or to call the priest to help you
Perchance here only is your
reward

Let not the left band know. Thus, says the Gospel,

Give it so privily In mens sight, or in your soul; Who is courteous, who kind,

(He turns to speak of corruption in small trade and of adulteration)

Women that bake and brew, They are the people They harm the poor there is no window nor altar and write MEED thereon; I will never fail you, that follow lechery, that love the same,—from it we all come—soon the harm is mended; none sooner shriven. to them that follow it, and I will build your cloister, your walls and your windows, of her that paid for the making, 'MEED—Sister of the Order."

such graving of your names, your well-done deeds, Pride and worldly pomp. and your own heart, and whose was the spent money. to write your names in windows, when you give your charity,

and here your heaven.

should good men do their alms, that no pride be seen God himself knoweth who covetous, who free.

butchers and cooks, that harm the poor, who can but buy in pennyworths,

Piers Plowman

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And secretly and oft
They grow rich on their retail
They buy houses,
If they sold honestly
Nor buy their tenures.
Mayors and their officers
Between the king and commons
They should punish these

they poison them; with what the poor should eat, they become landlords, they would not build so high,

the kings go-betweens to keep the laws, in pillories and stocks.

to Christ to avenge them

And the poor kneel and cry Here on earth

But Meed the maiden To take a bribe

"Or take you presents, "Silver cups and rings,

" For love of me

" And suffer them to sell

to Christ to avenge them or else in hell.

besought the mayor of all these hucksters: (the coin avoiding), and uphold their ways, love them all, somewhat against the law."

In whose band wickednesses be; their right band is fulfilled with aifts.

Solomon the sage To amend mayors and them He witnesseth what cometh

he made a sermon, that carry out the laws, when men take Meed:

Fire shall destroy their tabernacles that gladly take gifts.

"Fire shall fall and burn

"The houses and the homes

" Presents and yearly gifts,

(The narrative proceeds)

Then came the king from his
Council house
And sent for her to see him,
Courteously as became a king
Blamed her a little
And for wishing to be wedded
Till Truth had brought her
"Foolishly, woman,

all to blue ashes of them that ask for gifts, because of their office."

and called for Meed,
I saw not who brought her.
the king blamed her,
for loving Guile,
without his will,
a token from himself.
hast thou often done;

- "I have forgiven thee many a time
- "Thee and thine,
- "But the longer I let thee go
- "And never hast thou worse done
- "Hence to thy death-day
- "God forbid that any more
- "If thou shalt so do
- "Or in a place far worse
- " And hurt thee and harm thee
- "Shall be ware by thy case
- "I will teach thee to love truth
- "I have a knight named Conscience;
- " If he will wed thee,
- "Yea, my lord," saith she,
 "If I be not at thy bidding,
 Then was Conscience called
 Before the king and his
 council.

To wit the kings will

- "Wilt thou wed this woman
- "She is fain to be

and granted thee my grace, in hope thou shouldst amend, the less truth is with thee,

than to take to thee Falsehood; do so no more; thou trouble Truth and me. in Corfe Castle I shall shut thee, to live there as a nun, that all wanton women and shall ban thee and thine.

and take counsel of Reason.

he came from afar; wilt thou have him?"

"God forbid it me hang me at once." to come and appear

Conscience kneeled low and what he must do.

if I assent? thy fellow and thy mate."

- "Christ forbid," quoth Conscience,
- "Woe betide me,
- "She is frail of her faith,
- "She maketh men sin
- "Trust in her treasure
- "To wives and widows
- "Your father she killed
- "She poisoneth Popes

if such a wife I wed, fickle in her speech, many score times, betrayeth many, she teacheth wantonness, through her false behests, and harmeth the Church;

Piers Plowman

42

- "Chattering in her tongue,
- " As common as the pavement
- " Monks and minstrels,
- "Gentle and simple,
- " Jurymen and summoners
- "Sheriffs in shires
- "She taketh mens life and land,
- "She payeth the gaolers gold
- "And taketh true men by the top
- " For hatred she hangeth them
- " For excommunication
- "She giveth the bishops man a cope
- "When she will she is assoiled of sin
- "What the kings secret seal
- "For she is in the Popes secrets
- "Simony and she
- "She consecrateth bishops,
- "She giveth parsons prebends,
- "With their mistresses and darlings
- "To bring forth children
- "Woe to the realm
- "With her jewels, by Jesus,
- " And fighteth against Law
- "He may not get forth,
- "She leadeth Law where she pleaseth
- "And maketh men through love of her

lustful of her body, to every man that walketh, lepers in hedges, are her lovers when they will; are the men that praise her, were lost if MEED were gone;

setteth laws prisoners free, to let the false go far and wide,

and bindeth and hangeth them, who never did her harm. she careth not a rush,

and his clerk a coat,

and in one month can do can do in three,

—foreign priests know it—seal the Popes letters.

ignorant though they be, she abetteth priests

all their life long, against the Church law. when MEED is well with the king.

she shameth your justices, and stoppeth Faith at the gate, her florins fly so thickly;

and holdeth her courts

lose what justice oweth.

- "To the poor the courts are a maze
- "Law is so lordly
- "Without money paid in presents
- " Barons and burgesses
- "And all that are care-worn
- "Clergy and avarice
- "This is that ladys life,
- "And all that uphold her,
- " Poor men have no chance
- "No, though they be in pain,

Then Meed wept

- To give her grace to speak; "Excuse thee if thou canst,
- "For Conscience accuseth thee
- "Nay, my lord," quoth she,
- "When ye wot truly
- "Wherever great mischief is
- "And Conscience knoweth
- "Nor to deprave him,
- "Well knowest thou, false one,
- "Thou hast hung on my side
- "Hast had thy grip on my gold
- "It maketh me wonder
- " I can crown thee with gifts,
- "Foully thou defamest me
- "I never killed no king,
- "Not for me was the king hurt

if he plead there all his life, and loth to end his case;

Law listeneth to few.

she bringeth to sorrow, and would live in truth.

she coupleth together; God give her sorrow, mischance betide them, to plead their cause, so strong is MEED."

and prayed the king and the king granted it: . I can say but that, and would exile thee for ever."

"believe him not a whit, with whom the wrong lieth.

there MEED can help, I came not to chide with a proud heart. unless thou wilt lie, ten times and more

to give it where pleased thee, why thou art wroth with me. help thee more than thou knowest;

here before the king. no, nor counselled it, that time in Normandy;

Piers Plowman

44

"Thou, Conscience, shamedst him,

"Thou thoughtest winter

"Thou fearedst death

"Hurriedst to England

"Thou, robber pitiless,

" Poor mens money hadst thou

"I stayed there with my lord

"I made his men merry

"I patted their backs,

"I made them hop for hope

"Had I been marshal of his men,

"I durst have wagered my life,

" He should have had France

" And been king of that nation

"The least bairn of his blood

creptest into tents for cold, never would cease, for the dim cloud, for thy hungry belly.

robbest the poor; Calais to sell.

his life to save, and stopped all mourning, I boldened their hearts, to get MEED when they would; by Mary of Heaven, no less wager, in length and in breadth, his own kin to help; a barons peer had been.

"Then Conscience like a coward counselled him thence,

"To leave his lordship

"The richest realm

for a little silver, the clouds hang over.

"It becometh a king

"To give MEED to men

"To aliens, to all men,

" MEED maketh him loved,

"Emperors, earls,

" By MEED get yeomen

"The Pope and his prelates

"Give MEED to men

"Servants for their service

" Beggars for their prayers

" Minstrels for their mirth

"The king MEEDETH his men

"Men that teach children

" Priests that preach

who keepeth his realm who humbly serve him, to honour them with gifts, MEED maketh him a man; all manner of lords, to run and ride; take gifts and MEED, to uphold their laws; take MEED of their masters; get MEED that they pray for; ask men for MEED; to keep peace in his land; crave of them MEED; and teach the people

- " Ask MEED and mass-pence
- " Men of all crafts
- " Merchants and MEED
- "No wight I ween

Saith the king to Conscience, "Meed is right worthy

"By Christ, methinketh, to have the mastery."

and their food also;

- "Nay," quoth Conscience,
- "That Meed is evermore
- "There are two manner of MEEDS, my lord;
- "One is given by Gods grace
- "To them that well work
- "The prophet preached of it and in the P Lord, who shall dwell in Thy tabernacle?
- "Take no Meed, my lord,
- "Love them, believe them,
- "Gods Meed and Gods mercy

- crave MEED for their'prentices; go the road together, without MEED can live."
- "clerks know the truth, maintainer of Guile;
- in the bliss of heaven
 while they be here,
 and in the Psalter put it;
 - of men that be true, for our Lords love in heaven; therewith shalt thou win.
- "But there is Meed and Wage
- "Desert for a deed,
- " Meed many a time
- "And that is neither right nor reason
- "For man to take wage
- "The man is overbold
- "That before work is done
- " Harlots and whores,
- "They ask their hire-money
- "The guileful give before
- "When the deed is done
- "That is no Meed but wage
- "And if it be not paid
- " As in the Book that bids
- "The hirelings hire

and both men think open or secretly, is given before the deed,

and no nations law save he deserves it. or else he is not true, is paid or pay asketh. and false physicians, ere they have deserved it. and good men after, and the day ended. a due debt for the doing, the payer is to blame, none should withhold until the morning:

The work of thine bired man shall not dwell with thee till the morrow-tide.

Piers Plowman

46

" Priests and parsons

"That take Meed and money Here they have their reward.

that would please men for masses that they sing:

"What labourers and low men

" Is no manner of Meed,

take from their masters it is measurable hire.

"In merchandise is no Meed,

"It is an open change,

"And though the king of his courtesy, or Kaiser or Pope,

"Give men land or lordship,

"To their leal liege subjects; " And if the leal liege men

"Then may King and Kaiser

"Disavow that they did

" And take it away anon;

"May the men nor their heirs

"What King or Kaiser gave them

I well avow it,

one pennyworth for another, or other large gifts, love is the reason, be unloyal after, and the crowned Pope and others endow with it,

never more after be bold to claim

in property or rent.

"God gave Solomon

"Riches and reason,

" And as soon as God saw

"He robbed him of his riches

"And let him live in unbelief.

grace upon earth, while he lived rightly, he wrought not His will, and of his right mind, I think he be in hell.

"So God giveth nothing

"And King and Pope

"And take it again

"Whoso readeth Kings

"She brought Absalom

"And since King Saul saved a king for MEED

" Against Gods orders;

"That Saul for that sin

"God sent to Saul

"That Agag of Amalek

"Should die for a deed

but with, If thou dost well, may give and grant from them that do ill, may read of MEED. to hang on the tree,

God took such vengeance and his sons died. by Samuel the prophet and all his liege people their fathers had done:

- "' Therefore,' said Samuel,
- "' Be obedient and ready
- "' Wend with thy host
- "'Children and churls,
- "'Look thou kill the king,
- "'For millions of money;
- "'Children and cattle
- "And for he killed not
- "Coveted fair cattle,
- "God sent to say
- "And all his seed for that
- "Such mischief MEED
- "God hated him ever
- "The end of this story
- " For fear I offend
- " For so goes the world
- " If a man tell them truths
- "Right as Agag had
- "Samuel shall slay him,
- "David be diademed
- " And one Christian king
- " MEED shall no more
- " But Love and Lowliness
- " And he that trespasseth
- "Loyalty shall teach him law
- "And no sergeant wear silk
- "Nor fur on his cloak
- " MEED paid by misdoers
- "That Law is waxed a proud lord
- "Unkindness is in power,

'God himself biddeth thee his bidding to do, women to kill, chop them to death; covet not his goods, murder them each, burn all to ashes.'

as God himself bad and killed not his beasts, that Saul should die

shamefully end. brought on the king, and his heirs after him.

I care not to show; no end will I make; with them that have power he the sooner is blamed.

it shall happen to—some; Saul shall be blamed, and defy them all, shall keep us his people, be master on earth, and Loyalty together.

against the Truth, or lose his life.

for service that he doth, for pleading at the Bar. so rich men maketh

and Loyalty is poor; Kindness is banished,

"But human love shall yet

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"And make lawyers labourers; such love shall arise;

and Conscience with him,

and such perfect truth

and ween indeed

(men be so true)

"And such peace among the people

"That Jews shall wax glad

"Their King be come from Heaven,

" Moses or the Messiah,

"And all that wear daggers,

"Axes and hatchets.

"Shall be doomed to the death

"To scythe or sickle,

or bright swords or lances and any other weapon, unless he do smithy it share or coulter:

And they shall beat together their swords into shares and their spears into scythes.

"Each man shall play with a

plough, "Shall spin or spread dung,

" Priests and parsons

"Their psalters and their Seven Psalms,

"If any of them use

"He shall lose his livelihood,

"Neither king nor constable,

"Shall trouble the people,

"Nor put them on a jury-list

"But as a deed is done

"Mercy or no mercy.

pickaxe or spade, or spoil his life with sloth; shall hunt—their masses,

and pray for sinful men. hawking or hunting, perchance his life; knight nor mayor, nor summon them to court, to make them take an oath, it shall be judged,

" Kings court, commons courts,

"All shall be one court,

"Battles shall be none,

"And if a smith smithy one

consistory and chapter, and one judge-Justice; "His name is tidy True-tongue, he never harmed me yet; nor none wear an edge-tool,

it shall smite him to death.

Then shall not rear folk against tolk a sword.

And see this good fortune fall Six suns and a ship be seen, And mid-moon shall make And Saracens shall see and sing And on Mahomet and Meed Better is a good name than many riches.

As wroth as the wind "See what Solomon saith,

"They that give gifts

"And have much honour withal."

men shall find worse fortune, and half a sheaf of arrows, Jews to be converted, Glory to God in the highest, mishap shall come.

was Meed at that, in the Book of Wisdom, win the victory,

"I believe thee, lady,

"Thou art like the lady

" Try all things

"The leaf ended at those words,

" Had she looked on the left

"She would have found:

"So he that readeth Wisdom

"A full sad text

"There was no cunning clerk

thy text is true, that a verse read

-that pleased her heart,-

and turned the leaf over, Hold fast to that which is true. shall find a text of woe, to them that take this MEED.

to turn your leaf for you,

The that giveth gifts winneth the victory

And bath much bonour withal, but be taketh away the soul of bim that receiveth them.

"Worship he winneth

"But the soul that taketh the

gift

who will give MEED,

by that gift is bound."

THE VISION OF REASON CONSCIENCE AND THE KING

THE VISION OF REASON

- "CEASE," quoth the king,
- "Ye shall be friends
- "Kiss her, Conscience,
- "Nay, by Christ," says he, "Save Reason bid me
- "Then," quoth the king,
- " And fetch me Reason
- "And he shall rule my realm
- "Of thee, Conscience,
- "How thou leadest my people,
- "I am glad of that covenant," And rode forth to Reason
- "I am ready," says Reason, And called Cato his man, And Tommy True-Tongue-Nor-merry-lies-
- "Set my saddle
- "Fasten it well
- "And hang the heavy bridle on
- "He will wince and kick

Then Conscience on his way And Reason with him "What a Queen Meed is,

One Waryn Wisdom Followed them fast,

- "I suffer it no longer, and serve me both of you; I bid thee kiss her."
- " congee me for ever, I would rather die."
- "haste thee and ride, and bid him come and take account of thee, so Christ help me, learned and lowly."

said Conscience, "ifaith," and rounded in his ear.

"Rest thou a while," courteous of speech,

Tell-me-no-TalesI-never-loved-them.
on Suffer-till-I-see-my-time,
with Wise-word girths
to hold his head low,
ere he comes to the Court."

set forth to ride, whispering together, among rich and poor."

and his mate Wily-man which had to do

With Exchequer, chancery, And rode fast, that Reason And save them, for silver, and discharges of debts; should counsel them well from shame and from harm.

- "Here come they," quoth Conscience,
- "Ride on, Sir Reason,
- "Where wrath is and wrangling,
- "Where love is and loyalty,

" slaves of covetise, and reck not of either

there will they bide, their hearts are not.

Sorrow and cursedness is in the ways of them.

"They give of their goods, not a goose wing, The dread of God is not before their eyes.

- "They would do more
- "Or a dozen capons,
- "Than for love of our Lord
- "Let them ride on, Reason,
- "I, Conscience, know them not,

On rode Reason Conscience guiding,

Courteously the king met him Between himself and the Prince

Then came Peace to Parliament

- "Wrong has taken my wife
- "He has ravished Rose,
- " And Margarets maidenhead
- " My geese and pigs
- "I dare not for dread of him
- "Borrowed my horse of me,

for a dozen chickens, or a seam of oats, or all his dear Saints; —rich folks—by themselves.

nay, nor doth Christ."

by the strait high gate, till they came to the king.

and set him on a bench and talked long together.

and put forth a bill:
against my will,
Reginalds love,
—when he met her late;
his fellows fetch,
fight nor chide;
brought him home never,

- "And never a farthing,
- "To S. Giles fair
- " He watcheth me well
- "Which way I go
- " He maintaineth his men
- "He forestalleth my goods
- "He breaketh up my barn door
- "And giveth me a tally
- " Me and mine he threateneth,
- " Nor am I strong enough

The king knew he said truth, Wrong was a wicked wretch

Then was Wrong afeard,
Offered him pence:
"I would not reck if Peace
Then Wisdom and Waryn
"He that worketh by lust
"I say it of thee
"If Meed will not help thee
"Thy life and thy land
Then vowed Wrong
To make peace with his pence,

Wisdom and Wit then And took Meed with them

Peace put his head forth, "Guiltless, God wot, Conscience knoweth it

But Wisdom and Wit To win the king with bribes.

The king swore, by Christ, Wrong for his evil deeds for all I cared plead; I dare not take money, when I take silver with me, to rifle and rob me; to murder my labourers, and fighteth when I sell;

and carrieth off my wheat, for ten quarters of oats, lieth with my maid, even to look on him."

Conscience told him, and wrought much sorrow.

begged Wisdom make his peace,
"Had I the kings love
railed for ever."
warned Wrong wisely,
oft maketh wrath.
thou shalt it well find
thy harm is sure,
lie in her grace."
to Wisdom full eagerly
and paid "handy dandy."

went together, mercy to win.

his scalp all bloody; gat I this scathe, and the true commons."

went their ways

and by his crown, should suffer woe,

Commanded the constable "Let him not see his feet

"God wot," saith Wisdom,
"If he will make amends

" And he shall give sureties

"Amend what is mis-done

Wit agreed:

"Than for ill to be beaten,

Then Meed bethought her Proferred Peace a present "Take this, man, from me, "And I will wager Wrong

Then Peace pitifully
To have mercy on the man

"He hath paid me well, So that the king assent,

"Meed hath made amends,

"Nay," quoth the king,

"Wrong goeth not so away,

"If he slip lightly off

" And be the bolder

"If Reason hath not pity

"As long as he liveth,

to cast him in irons; for this seven year."

"this is not the best way, let him have bail, and buy him his remedy, and evermore be better."

"Better is a remedy and remedy no better."

and begged for him mercy, all of pure gold: to heal thy hurt, shall do so no more."

prayed to the king
that had so often wronged
him:
and—I forgive him,
I can no more say,
I ask no more."

"Christ help me,
I will learn more of this;
then will he laugh at me,
to beat my servants;
he shall stay in my stocks
till lowliness be bail."

Some men counselled Reason: "Advise the king,

"To let Meed go bail for Wrong."

10 100 11000 80 0011 101 111016.

"Counsel me no pity," says Reason,

"Till lords and ladies

love the truth,

" Have thou pity,

advise Conscience,

"Till	they	hate	the	loose	word
66 m:11	41 1		. 1.*	.41 .	

Till the harlots kirtle

" Till children be cherished

"Till holiness of the wicked

" Till the clergy be covetous

"Till the rambling monks

"Till preachers preaching

"Till the kings Council

"Till bishops horses

"Their hawks and their hounds

"Till men go on pilgrimage

"In prisons and in humble cots;

"And if men go a pilgriming, To Rome or Spain

"Till Rome-runners carry

"Graven or ungraven,

"On forfeiture of it

"(Saving it be merchant,

"Or appointed priests

" By the rood of Christ

"While Meed is mistress

"If I were crowned king

"Never should Wrong

"Nor get my mercy by bribes,

"No, not unless penitence

"The man EVIL shall ever

"The man GOOD shall ever

to hear it or speak it, be hidden away, with the stroke of the rod, be taken at its worth, to clothe the poor, be kept to their cloister, be proved by their lives, be the profit of the people, be sold for houses,

to help Gods poor,

to where the sick lie,

save where I send them, let them stay there for ever.

no silver over sea, for the robber Pope of France, if it be found at Dover, or messenger with letters, returning to the Pope.)

no pity will I have in this Council hall; to keep a realm go unpunished, God save my soul, went with the fine. meet the man PUNISHMENT meet REWARD.

"If thou, king, wilt do this,

I wager my hands "Lawyers shall turn labourers, and lead the dung a-field,

"And Love shall be the leader in thy land."

I saw Meed in the Council hall And they laughed and went to her,

wink at the lawyers,

and many left Reason.

58

Piers Plowman

All the righteous knew
And Kind-Wit and Conscience
And rich and poor loved him.

that Reason spoke truth, courteously thanked him,

"We see well," they said, "by thy words, Sir Reason, "Meekness is master of Meed at the last."

Love made light of Meed, And they cried to Conscience "If a man take Meed to wife "Cut off my nose Loyalty made lighter,
—the king might well hear it—
for her wealth and her goods
if he be not cuckolded."

Meed mourned then

For the commons called her

A juror and a summoner
And a sheriffs clerk
"Full oft have I
"And yet ye never gave me

Neither Wisdom Could frame a word They stared and studied

The king agreed, by Christ, And rehearsed all that Reason "But, by my head, 'tis hard "All my liege people

"By him that stretched
"If I rule not thy realm thus

" If so be obedience

"And bring all men to bow to me

"Without fines, without murders,

and her countenance was sad,

"quaint, common whore."

followed her fast, cursed before the company: helped you at the Bar, the worth of a rush."

nor Witty his mate to withsay Reason; and stood like cows.

to Reasons cunning, had rightfully shown: to bring things to this, to lead to honesty."

on the Rood," quoth Reason, rend out my ribs; is at one with me,

amending the kingdom,

without bitter wounds."

"I would it were well,"	quoth the king, "the world over;
"Therefore, Reason, indeed	thou shalt not ride hence,
"But be my chief chancellor	in Exchequer and in Parlia- ment,
"And Conscience Justice	in all my courts."
"I assent if thou, king,	wilt hear causes too.
"Hear the other side.	Among aldermen and com- moners
"No sufferance of wrong	shall seal your secret letters,
"Nor shall there be stay of pro	ceedings.
"Then I wager my life	that Love will lend thee silver
"To pay thy wages	and help to win thee gold
" More than all thy merchants,	or thy mitred bishops,
"Or Lombards of Italy,	that live by Jews usury."

The king commanded Conscience to congee his officers

And take those whom Reason
loved, and with that I woke.

THE WRITERS LIFE

THE WRITERS LIFE

THUS I woke, God wot,
(Kit my wife and I,)
And among the London lollers
And among the hermits
For I made verses on them

where I dwelt in Cornhill. dressed like a loller, little was I set by, (trust me for that), as my wit taught me.

Once when I had my health, And my limbs to labour with, And nothing in life to do, In health of body and mind, I came on Conscience, He met and questioned me, And Reason reproved me.

in hot harvest time, and loved good fare, but drink and sleep,

and Reason met me, and my memory roamed back,

"Canst thou serve as a priest "Make a haycock in the field

" Canst mow or stock

"Canst reap or guide the reapers?

"Canst blow the horn,

"Lie out o' nights,

" Make shoes or clothes,

"Trim hedge, use harrow,

"Or do any other work

"To win some living

or sing in church? or pitch the hay? or bind the sheaves?

Canst rise early? and keep the kine together, and save my corn from thieves?

or herd the sheep? or drive the swine and geese, that the people need for them that be bedridden?"

"Nay," said I, "God help me,

"I am too weak to work

"I am too long, believe me,

" Or to last for any time

with sickle or with scythe. to stoop low down, as a true working man."

"Then hast thou lands to live by

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"That findeth thee thy food?

"Thou art a spender and canst spend;

"Or thou beggest thy living

"Thou art a Friday-beggar,

"A lollers life is thine,

"Righteousness rewardeth men

Thou shalt yield to each man after his works.

"Thou art maybe broken

"Maimed maybe through mishap,

or rich lineage An idle man thou seemest;

thou art a spill-time, at mens buttery hatches; a feast-day beggar in churches;

little to be praised. as they deserve.

" many a year ago,

set me to school

in body or limb,

therefore art thou excused?"

what Holy Scripture said,

what is safest for the soul.

save in these long clothes,

since my friends died

at the work I learned.

and earn my living

"When I was young," quoth I,

" My father and my friends

"Till I knew throughly

"What is best for the body,

"Yet never did I find

"A life that pleased me

"If I must live by labour

"I must needs labour

Each man in what calling be is called there dwell be.

"I live in London

"The tools I labour with,

"Are the Lords Prayer, my Primer,

"And sometimes my Psalter

"I sing masses for the souls

"And they that find me food

" Man or woman, once a month,

"No bag have I nor bottle,

"Moreover, my lord Reason,

"Constrain no cleric

and I live on London, to get my living by,

my Dirges and my Vespers, and the Seven Psalms; of those that give me help, welcome me when I come, into their houses; only my belly.

men should, methinks, to do common work,

- "The tonsured clerk,
- "Should neither sweat nor toil, nor swear at inquests,
- "Nor fight in the van of battle, nor hurt his foe.

Render not evil for evil.

- "They be the heirs of heaven,
- "And in choir and church Christs own min The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance.

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- "Clerks it becometh
- "And for folk unordained
- "And no clerk should be tonsured
- " Of frankleyns and free men
- " Bondmen and bastards
- "These are the sons of labour,
- "To serve God and the good
- "But since bondmens sons
- "And bastard bairns
- "And soap-makers and their sons
- "And lords sons be their labourers
- " And to support this realm
- "To comfort the Commons
- " And monks and nuns
- "Have made their own kin knights
- "Popes and patrons
- "And take the sons of Mammon to keep the Sanctuary;
- 'Holiness of life and Love
- "And will be till these things wear out,
- "Therefore, rebuke me not,
- "For in my conscience I know
- "Prayers of a perfect man
- "These be the dearest work

all that are ordained, Christs own ministers.

a man of understanding.

for to serve Christ.

to cart and work,

save he be the son and of wedded folk; and beggars children, these are to serve lords, as their station asketh.

are made into bishops, are made archdeacons,

are knights for silvers sake,

and have mortgaged their rents have ridden against our foes and honour the king, that should support the poor

and paid the fees for it, refuse poor gentle blood, to keep the Sanctuary; have long to us been strangers,

or they be somehow changed.

Reason, I pray thee, what Christ would have me do. and his discreet penance, that our Lord loveth."

"But to beg your life in cities

"Save you be in obedience

Quoth Conscience, "By Christ, I see not where this tendeth, is not the perfect life, to Prior or to Minster."

"That's truth," said I, "That I have lost my time,

"And yet I hope that even as one

"And always lost and lost

"To buy him such a bargain

"And all his loss is at the last "Such a winning is his,

A woman who found a piece of silver . . . etcetera.

"Even so hope I to have " A gobbet of His grace;

"That shall turn to profit

" T thee," counsel quoth Reason,

"The life that is commendable

"Aye, and continue in it,"

So to the kirk I went Before the Cross upon my knees Sighing for my sins, Weeping and wailing

"I do acknowledge it, mis-spent my time,

who oft hath bought and sold and at the last hath happened that he is better for ever only as a leaf, under Gods grace, The kingdom of beaven is like treasure . . . etcetera. of Him that is Almighty and then begin a time all the days of my life."

> "hurry to begin and dear to the soul;" quoth Conscience.

to honour my Lord;

I knocked my breast, saying my prayer, till again I was asleep.

THE VISION OF REASONS SERMON

PREACHED TO THE FIELD FULL OF FOLK, AND OF THE SHRIVING OF THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

THE VISION OF REASONS SERMON

THE king and his knights
To hear the days mattins
Then I waked from my slumber
That I had not slept sounder
But ere I fared a furlong
I could go no foot further
And sat me softly down,
Babbled my prayers,

to the kirk went, and the mass after. and woe it was to me and seen the more, faintness took me; for want of sleep, and said my creed, they brought me sleep.

Then I saw much more than I have told before, I saw the FIELD FULL OF FOLK.

Reason arrayed himself and preached to all the

and preached to all the kingdom,

And held a cross before the king

and thus began:

He prayed the people
He proved these Pestilences
The South-West hurricane
Was openly for pride,
Pear trees, plum trees,
An example, ye men,
Beeches and broad oaks
Their roots up-turned
That deadly sin at Doomsday

have pity on themselves. were for pure sin. on Saturday even, for nothing clse, puffed to earth, ye should live better lives. blown to the ground, in token of dread, shall ruin us all.

He bade wasters go work And with some kind of craft at what they best knew, earn what they wasted now.

He prayed Parnel the gay And keep it in her coffer put by her broidered robe, to serve her at her need.

Tom Stowe he told And bring home Felice

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to take two sticks, from the scolding-stool.

Watt he warned Her bonnet cost a half-mark, his wife was in the wrong, his hood a groat.

Batt he bad go and cut And beat Betty with it

a bough or two, if she would not work.

Merchants he charged And let no money pamper them And not to cocker them

to chasten their children

"My sire told me and my dame

while they be young, for any plague that comes.

"That the dearer the child is "Solomon that wrote Wisdom the more he must learn said the same:

Qui parcit virgae odit filium. "The English of this Latin is, "Spare the switch,

if any one would know it, spill the son."

And then he prayed prelates: "Live as ye teach us,

"What ye preach, do, we shall trust you the better."

Then he bade Religion

keep to her Rule, take your wealth

"Lest the king and the commons "And be stewards in your

till ye be better governed."

places

"Gregory that great clerk wrote the Rule down-

"As fishes in drought

"Even so Religion

"When out of cloister

"For if there be heaven on earth,

die for water. rotteth and starveth it coveteth to dwell:

or ease to any soul, "It is in the cloister or the school.

"To the cloister man cometh

not to chide nor fight,

- "All is book and obedience, reading and learning;
- "In the school the clerk is scorned
- "Great love and liking there;

if he will not learn; each loveth other.

- "But now is Religion a rider,
- "A leader at the love-day,
- "Pricking on a palfrey
- "A heap of hounds at his back
- " And if his servant kneel not
- "He loureth on him asking
- " Badly have lords done
- " Away to the Orders
- " Money rains upon their altars.
- "There where such parsons be
- "They have no pity on the poor;
- "Ye hold you as lords;
- "But there shall come a king
- "And beat you as the Bible saith
- "He shall mend you monks
- "And put you to your penance
- "And barons and their sons

These in chariots and these in borses . . . they be bound and fell down.

- "Friars in their begging
- "To Constantines coffers
- "That Gregorys godchildren
- " For the Abbot of Abingdon
- "Shall be knocked on their crowns
- "But ere that king come,
- "The church and the clergy

Then he counselled the king "Where treason is not

a roamer through the streets, a buyer of the land, from manor to manor, as tho he were a lord, when he brings his cup, who taught him courtesy. to give their heirs lands that have no pity;

living at ease

that is their 'charity.'
your lands are too broad,
and he shall shrive you all

for breaking of your Rule.
you canons and you nuns,
and make you walk in old paths
shall blame and reprove you.
n borses . . . they be bound

shall find the key in which is the money wickedly wasted. and his niece the abbess

and the wound shall be mortal, so chronicles tell me, shall be clothed new."

the commons to love they are thy treasure,"

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"And treacle in thy need.

"Rich and commons should agree

"Let no manner of counsel

"But in sense and good will

"In heaven on high

"Till liar Lucifer

"Worthier and wittier

"Hold ye then in unity

"Is cause of all that cumbers

Then he prayed the pope And grant no grace Among all kings "And all confessors

"Give Peace as your penance

"For all manner deeds

"And ye that seek S. James, "Seek ye Saint Truth,

Who with the Father and the Son . . .

"Fair befall them So ended Reason.

Then ran Repentance

And made me, William, weep.

in all kind of truth.

nor covetise part you,
guard ye your trust.

was such a holy commonweal
believed himself
than his Master was.

and he who would teach you other

and confounds a realm."

have pity on the church, till good love comes over their Christian peoples; that shrive any king and perpetual pardon and for each to love others.

and saints of Rome, for he shall save you all,

that follow my sermon,"

(Here begin the Repentance and Shriving of the Seven Deadly Sins)

and repeated Reasons words

(PRIDE OF WOMAN)

Parnel proud-hearted Long she lay ere she looked Promised to Him She would unsew her shift To tame her flesh lay flat upon the earth, "O God, have mercy." that made us all and set a hair shirt there, so fierce to sin:

The Vision of the Seven Sins

73

- " Pride shall not draw me,
- "I will let me be slandered,
- "Now I will meek me,
- "All this till now

"Repent thee," quoth Repentance,

"Shrive thee and sharply

I will hold me low, that did I never; mercy beseeching; have I hated in my heart."

"as Reason hath taught thee, and shake off thy pride."

(PRIDE OF MAN)

- " I, Pride, patiently,
- "First to father and mother
- "Unabashed to offend
- "Inobedient to the Church
- "I judged her for her vices;
- "With word and wit
- "Scorning them and others
- "That simple folk should think me
- " Proud of my apparel;
- "Other than I was
- "Willing men to think me,
- "Rich and eloquent,
- " A boaster, a braggart, I,
- "Vaunting my vainglory
- "Singular, alone,
- "Some time in one faith,
- "Wishing men should think
- "My craft the cleverest,
- " My strength the stiffest,
- " My love the sweetest,
- " Proud of my fair features,
- "What I gave for Gods love
- " For them to think me holy,

ask for penance,
was I inobedient,
God and the good,
and to them that serve her,
I urged on others,
the churchmens evil works to
show,
when I saw my time

witty and wise.

appearing among men
in mind or in wealth;
for the goods I had,
righteous in my life;
full of bold oaths,
in face of all reproof;
for none was like to me;
some time in another,
my work was the best,
my riding the strongest,
my face the handsomest,
my crimes the boldest,
proud of my shrill song.

I told my gossips all about it holy and free of alms;

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"None so bold a beggar

"A teller of tales

"Things that none had thought

"Them that sat beside me

"'Lo, if ye believe me not

"' Ask him, ask her,

"What I suffered, what I saw,

"What I once could do,

"I would men knew it all

"To be praised among the people."

3f 3 pleased men 3 could not be Christs servant, Mo man can serve two masters.

"Now God of his goodness

give thee grace to amend,"

to ask what I craved;

I took to witness:

or if ye ween I lie

what kin I came of,

in inns and at street corners;

I swore I saw them done;

for they can tell you all.'

what I had, what I knew,

if it but helped my pride

Quoth Repentance,

(LECHERY)

Then said Lechery, "Alas,

"Lady, to thy dear Son,

"To have pity on me lustful

"I will drink with the duck

"I am guilty in spirit,

"In words, in dress,

"Every maid I met

"Some would I kiss and handle

"On fast days, on Fridays,

"In Lent and out of Lent,

"Such work with me and them

"Merry tales we had

"Clever songs we made;

"To win with guile

"Some I won by sorcery,

"I took the loveliest

"When I was old and hoar

"Now, Lord, of thy grace,

O our Lady,

pray for me now;

of his pure mercy and grace; and dine but once on Saturday.

I am guilty in body,

in watching for eyes.

I made her a sin-sign,

till our lust was one;

on feast-day vigils,

all times were one to me;

was never out of season.

of lust and paramours,

we sent out bawds, women to my will.

some I won by strength;

and never loved them after,

and had lost my nature

"Then would I laugh at lecherous tales.

on Lechers have mercy."

(ENVY)

Envy with heavy heart
"My fault," says he,
His clothes were of cursing
He was pale as a stone;
And like a leek that had lain
So looked he with long cheeks
His body was all swollen with
wrath;

And went wringing his fists; With word or deed Every word he threw Of chiding and of challenging Backbiting and calumny This was his courtesy asked for his shrift, cursing all his enemies. and of keen words; in a palsy he seemed, long in the sun foully louring.

he bit his lips, he would wreak vengeance when his time he saw. was of an adders tongue; all his living was; and bearing of false witness, where'er he showed his face.

"I would be shriven," quoth this shrew,

"I would be gladder, by God,

- "Than if I this week had won
- "I have a neighbour near me,
- "Blamed him behind his back,
- "Lied to lords about him,
- " Made his friends his foes,
- "His weal and his good chances
- "Between him and his servants
- "His life and his limbs

"When at market I meet

- "I hail him kindly
- "I dare do no other,
- "Had I mastery and might
- "When I come to the kirk
- "And pray for the people

"if for shame I durst.
if Gilbert had a hurt
a wey of Essex cheese.
I have envied him often,
to bring slander on him,
to make him lose his silver,
through my false tongue;
grieve me full sore,
have I made strife,
were lost through my speech.

him I most hate, as I his friend were; he is stronger than I. God knows what I would do.

and should kneel to the Rood, as the priest preacheth,

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- "Then I cry on my knees:
- "' That took away my bowl
- "Then from the altar
- "Heyne hath a new coat,
- "I wish it were mine
- "When men lose I laugh,
- "When they win I weep,
- "I deem that they do ill
- " And if any rebuke me
- "I would that each man
- "If one hath more than I
- "Thus I live loveless
- "And all my body swelleth
- "I blame men behind them
- "What I hear from Will,
- "All I know from Watkin,
- "I make foes of friends
- "I burn myself within me
- "Through my power of talk,
- "I take my vengeance
- " Against Christs counsel.
- "And when I cannot master them
- "That I catch cramp,
- "Ague or fever,
- "The leechcraft of our Lord
- "No clerk can help me
- "Like the cobbler of Southwark
- "God and His words
- "Like a chance charm I have;

'Christ give them sorrow, and my torn sheet.'

I turn my eyes and see and his wife another, and all the piece it came from.

my heart loveth that, and wail to think of it, when I do far worse, I hate him deadly evermore. were my servant. that angrieth me sore, like a vicious dog, so bitter is my gall.

and pray for their mischance;
I tell it to Watkin,
Will hears it after.
through a false and fickle
tongue;
as with a tailors shears.
through many a trick,
and curse my fellow-Christians

I take such melancholy, and sometimes spasms, till I forget and believe in the wizards. no, nor Christ,

or Dame Em of Shoreditch. give me no help that chiefly cured me.

- "For many a year I could not eat
- "For envy and ill-will
- " No sugar nor sweet thing
- "Nor any remedy on earth
- " No, neither shrift nor shame,
- "Yes, there is remedy," quoth Repentance,
- "Sorrow for sin
- "I am sorry," says he,
- "That makes me meagre,
- "I am a broker of backbiting,
- "When he sold and I did not
- "To lie and to glower
- "Their works and their words,
- "Now it grieves me in my mind
- "Ere I my life leave, O Lord,
- "Grant me, good Lord,

as a man should, be hard things to digest; may assuage my swelling, drive it from my heart, save one should scrape my maw."

and gave him counsel of the best, is salvation of soul."

"seldom am I not; for I cannot avenge me.

I blame mens wares. then was I ready and blame my neighbours, wherever I was.

that ever I did so;

grant me of thy love, grace of amendment."

(WRATH)

Now awoke Wrath With snivelling nose,

- "I am Wrath," quoth he,
- "With stone or staff
- "Bethinking me of sleights
- "Though I sat here seven years
- "The harm I have done
- "Impatient of all penances,
- "And grumbling at His sending

with his two white eyes, and bitten lips.

"I will gladly smite or steal upon my enemy, to slay them slyly,

I could not well tell with hand and tongue, complaining of God, when aught grieved me,

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Piers Plowman

- "Sometimes in summer,
- "If weather were not as I wished
- " Mid all kinds of men
- "With gentle and simple
- "I am Wrath.
- "Gardener in the convent,
- "I grafted lies
- "And the lies bare leaves
- " And entered my ladys bower
- "Now comes the fruit.-
- "To preachers and visitors
- " Parsons soon see
- "Then parsons preach
- "And Friars blame parsons;
- "I, Wrath, walk mid all,
- "Both vaunt their spiritual power,
- "Each contemns the other,
- "Or else ride about rich,
- "I, Wrath, never rest
- "I have an aunt, a Nun,
- "They would sooner faint or die
- "I was cook in their kitchen,
- " Many months with them,
- "Broth for the prioress I made
- "Broth and soup made out of chatter.
- "'Sister Joan was a bastard.
- "'Sister Clarice a knights daughter,

and sometimes in harvest,

then I blamed God.

my dwelling is, that love to hear harm,

Once I was a Friar, grafting slips; on preachers and visitors, and blossomed abroad, to hear confessions.

Men will go shrive them and not to their parsons, these share their shrift-money, and defame the Friars, all men know it.

I teach them from the book of

their spiritual power is Wrath, and all come to poverty, and their spiritual power is mine.

from following these wicked.

another an Abbess,

Wrath

than suffer any penance. I served the convent, and many with the monks, and for other poor ladies,

Thus it went,

her father a cuckold;

- "'Sister Pernella priests wench,
- "'She bore a child in cherrytime;
- "'They challenged her with it

not fit to be prioress;

all the chapter knew it, at her election day.'

- "I, Wrath, their pottage made all out of wicked words.
- "' Liar thou art," cries one,
- " Each hit the other
- 'Liar, liar,' cries the other, under the cheekbone,
- "Had they had knives, by Christ, each had killed the other.
- " All ladies loathe me

that love honourable ways.

" Among wives and widows

"High fenced in the high pews in church,

- "The parson knoweth well
- "She took the Sacrament before me
- "Each called the other whore.
- "Heads were bare,

I am wont to sit,

how I hate Lettice;

and she and I met and chid, Off with our clothes. and cheeks bloody.

- " Among the monks I might be
- "There be so many cruel men
- "The Prior, the sub-prior,
- "If there I tell my angry tales
- "And make me fast on Fridays on bread and water.
- "I am challenged in the chapter
- "Birched on the bare backside

but often I shun it, my doings to espy, and Father abbot, they meet and take me as though I were a child,

and never a shirt between.

- "I have no liking
- "They eat more fish than flesh;
- "And once when wine cometh
- "I have a flux of foul words
- "All the wickedness I know
- "I cough it up in our cloisters

to live among the monks, they drink feeble ale, and I sit and drink late for five days after. of any in our convent and all the world hears it."

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Piers Plowman

"Repent ye," quoth Repentance,

"The counsel that thou knowest

"Nor drink delicate drink,

"Lest thy will and thy wit

"Be thou sober," says he, And bad him pray to God " and never more repeat

by thy look or by thy speech, nor drink deep at all, should turn to wrath. and gave him absolution to be his prospering help.

(COVETOUSNESS OR AVARICE)

Then came Covetise,
So hungry and hollow
Beetle-browed, babber-lipped,
And, like a leather purse,
Below his chin
A hood upon his head,
A tawny cloak upon him,
All torn and rotten
But, if a louse could leap away,
So threadbare was the cloth of it.

him cannot I describe, Sir Harveys self he looked; with his bleared eyes, his cheeks lolled down and shivered with age. and a lousy hat on top, twelve winters old, and full of creeping lice; she had not been there

"I have been covetous," quoth this caitiff,

"I do acknowledge it,

"Once I served Sim At-stile,

"First I learnt to lie,

"Then to weigh false

"To Winchester and Weyhill

"With all kinds of merchandise

"But had not grace of Guile

"They had been unsold seven years,

"Then I passed to the drapers,

"To draw the edges out

and was his 'prentice bound, a page or two of lies, was my second lesson, I went to the fair as my master bad, gone with me and my goods,

Gods my witness.

to learn my other lessons, that the flannel might seem longer.

The Vision of	the Seven Sins 8
"Among the rich striped cloths	I learned another lesson,
"Threaded them with pack- needles,	fastened them together,
"Put them in a press,	pinned them down therein,
"Till ten yards or twelve	made out—thirteen.
" My wife was a weaver,	woollen cloth she made,
"She spake to her spinners	to spin it soft,
"But the pound-weight she	• ,
paid by	weighed a quarter more
"Than my own balance did,	when I weighed fair.
"I used to buy her barley,	she brewed it to sell,
" Penny ale and thick ale,	she mixed it together,
"For labourers and poor folk.	It lay by itself;
"The best ale in my bower,	or in my bedchamber;
"Any man that boozed of that	never bought other,
"Fourpence a gallon,	and no good measure either
"When it was served in cups.	In that my wife was cunning:
"Rose of the Small Shop	was her true name,
"She has been a huckster	these eleven winters.
"But now I swear, so may I	
thrive	this chapting I will ston

thrive,

"Nevermore will I weigh false,

"But I will wend me to Walsingham,

" And pray to Bromholm cross,

"Didst ever repent?

"Yes, once I was in an inn,

"I rose when they were sleeping,

"That was no restitution,

"Thou hadst deserved hanging for that

this cheating I will stop, nor cheat in selling,

and my wife with me, to save me from my sins."

didst never restitution make?"

with a heap of travellers,

and rifled their packs."

that was a robbers theft; more than for all thy cheating else."

"I thought rifling was restitution," says he,

"I know no French i'faith,

"Didst ever use usury,

"Nay, saving in my youth,

"I weighed pence with a weight,

" And lent money on pledge,

" I wrote me out agreements;

"I gat me more wealth

"I have lent to lords and ladies,

"I lent to folk that were willing to lose

"I had bankers letters

"I counted it right here,

"Didst ever lend to lords

"Ay, I have lent to lords;

"I have made many a knight

"They gave me colours to wear,

"Never a pair of gloves

"Hast thou pitied the poor,

"Ay, as much pity

"Would kill them an they catch them,

"Art thou free among thy neighbours

"I never learned my book; only from far Norfolk."

in all thy lifetime?"

with Lombards and Jews,

I pared the heaviest,
the pledge was worth more
than the loan.
if the borrower failed his day,
than through merciful lending.

and myself redeemed the pledge;

a bit from every coin. and took my coin to Rome, but there it was less."

in return for their protection?"

they never loved me after; into mercer and draper, thus they were my 'prentices, did they pay me for the same."

who sometimes needs must borrow?"

as pedlars have on cats,

for the sake of their skins."

with thy meat and drink?"

- "I am held as courteous
- "That is the name I have among them."
- "God grant thee never
- "Save thou repent thee soon
- "God grant thy sons after thee
- "And thine executors no profit
- "That which was won by wrong
- "For neither Pope nor Pardoner
- "To pardon thee thy sins, save thou make repartible sin is not remitted save restitution be made.

his grace through all thy life, and use well thy goods. no joy of that thou winnest, in that thou leavest them;

as a dog is in a kitchen;

shall be spent by the wicked,

hath ever power save thou make reparation." restitution be made.

"Ay, I have won my goods

"I have gathered what I have

"I mixed my merchandise,

- "But the best was outside the shop
- "There was wit in that.

with false word and wit, with glosing and with guile; I made a fine array,

and the worst inside—

better at all than mine,

to get it for mine own,

at the last I stole it;

or I picked his locks.

- "And if my neighbour had man or beast
- "I tried many a trick
- "And, save I got it otherwise,
- "I shook his purse out
- " If I went to the plough,
- "A foot or a furrow
- "If I reaped I would reach over,
- "Seize with their sickles

I pinched of his half-acre, of my neighbours land,

or bad them that reaped for me what I never sowed.

- "In holy-days at church,
- "I had no will
- "Nay, I mourned my loss of goods,

when I heard mass, to weep my sins;

and not my bodys guilt.

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Piers Plowman

"When I did deadly sin,

"As when I lent and thought it lost

" If I sent my servant

"To do traffic with money

"No man could comfort me,

"Nor penance done,

"My mind was on my goods,

Where your treasure is there shall your heart be also.

to Bruges or Prussia-land, and to make exchange, nor mass nor mattins, nor paternoster prayed;

when payment was delayed.

I feared it not so much,

not on Gods grace.

"In sooth," Repentance said, "Were I a Friar, in good faith,

"I would take no money of

thine. "Nor mend our church with

gold of thine, "By my souls health I would not

"For the best book in our House,

"If I knew thee to be what thou sayest

Better die than live ill.

"I counsel any faithful Friar

"I would liever, by our Lord,

"Than have food and finding When thou eatest rich food thou art anothers slave: seed on thine own loaf and be free.

"Thou art unnatural;

"Make reparation,

"All that take of thy goods,

" Are bound at the High Judgment

"The priest that taketh tithe of thee,

"Shall share thy purgatory

"I have pity on thy life, for all the gold in earth,

nor robe me in goods of thine, nor take a dinners cost from thee:

a penny pittance of thee

tho the leaves were burnt gold;

I would sooner starve.

never to sit at board of thine, live upon watercress from a false mans fortune,

I cannot pardon thee and reckon with them all. God is my witness,

to help thee to restore.

if he know thee what thou art, and help to pay thy debt.

"Never workman in this "Look in the Psalter:

For lo thou desiredst truth.

"Then thou shall know fully

"And what the priests penance is

" For a harlot of her body hire

"And shall sooner come to heaven

"God be my witness."

Then that shrew waxed despairing

Had not Repentance comforted him thus:

"Have mercy in thy thoughts,

" For Gods mercy is more

"And all this worlds wickedness,

"Is no more to the mercy of God "Thou hast not good enough

in thee

"Saving by penitence,

"The goods thou hast gotten

"And long as thou livest on

" And if thou know not

"Take thy money to the Bishop,

"He shall answer for thee

"For thee-and many more."

"Never workman in this world shall thrive on thy winnings;

what usury doth mean,

who is proud of thine offerings; may more boldly pay church tithe

than an arrant usurer like thee.

and would have hanged himself,

and in thy prayers pray for it, than all His other works,

that man can work or think, than is a spark in Thames.

to buy thee a wastel cake,
or work of thy two hands.
began in falsehood,
thou payest not but borrowest
more;

to whom to make thy reparation,

bid him use it for thy soul; at the High Judgment day,

(GLUTTONY)

Now beginneth Gluttony And fare to churchward

to go to shrive him, his sins to show.

Forth he went upon his way But Betty the brewster And asked of him withal fasting, on a Friday, bad him good morrow, whitherward he went.

"I go to church," says he,
"And then will I be shriven,

"for to hear mass, and I shall no more sin."

"Gossip," says she, "I have good ale;

wilt taste it, Glutton?"

"What hast thou?" says he,

"any hot spice?"

"Pepper and peony seeds," says she,

"and a pound of garlic, for your fasting day."

"And a farthings worth of fennel,

and great oaths welcomed him.

Then in goes Glutton

sat on the bench, and his wife—drunk; and two of his 'prentices, Hogg the needler, and the parish clerk; and Pernel the Flemish woman, and a dozen more of them; and a Cheapside scavenger, and Rose of the Small Shop, and the Tyburn hangman; Griffin the Welshman, welcomed Glutton gladly

Cis the shoemaker
Watt the gamekeeper
Tom the tinker
Hick the hackneyman,
Clarice of Cock Lane
Parson Piers of Pray-to-God
Daw the ditcher
A fiddler, a ratter,
A ropemaker, a trooper,
A watchman and a hermit,
Godfrey the garlic seller,
All early in the morning
To try the new good ale.

threw down his cloak, at the New Fair Change. threw down his hood, be speaker on his side; the exchange to value—

Then cobbler Clement
And said it was for sale
Hick the hackneyman
And bad Bet the butcher
Two then were chosen

He that had the hood
The two rose readily,
And went aside
They could not in their conscience
Till Robin the ropemaker
And named an umpire
Hick the ostler
And Clement took Hicks hood
And held him satisfied;
Sir Glutton should be treated

should have somewhat with it. and whispered together, and valued the goods,

truly agree;
was bidden to arise,
that quarrel should be none.
took the cloak,
and a cup of ale,
for if one should repent of it
to a gallon of ale.

There was laughing and chattering, Bargains and toasts and songs, And Glutton had gulped down

and, "Pass the cup round," and so they sat—till evensong, a gallon and a gill.

He could neither step nor stand
Then gan he walk
Now to this side, now to that,
Like a man who lays lines
And when he drew to the
doorstep,
He stumbled on the threshold

till he had his staff, like a blind singers dog, and sometimes backward, to catch wild birds;

doorstep,
He stumbled on the threshold
Then Cobbler Clement
To lift him up on high
But Glutton was a heavy churl
And coughed up his drink

then his eyes grew dim, and fell flat on the floor; caught him by the waist and get him to his knees; and groaned as he lifted him, in Clements lap.

With all the trouble in the world
Bore him home to his bed
And after all this surfeit
All Saturday and Sunday slept
Then waked he from his winking
And the firstword he threw was,

his wife and his wench and laid him therein; he had a sleeping fit; till the sun went to rest.

and wiped his eyes, "Where's the tankard?"

His wife and his conscience
He waxed ashamed, that shrew,
And to Repentance cried,
"Thou, Lord, that art on high
"To thee, God, I, Glutton,
"Guilty of trespass with my
tongue,

""By Gods soul, By Gods sides,

"When there was no need of oath.

"I have over eaten at suppertime

" More than my body

"And then I, Glutton, cast it up

"And spoilt what might have well been

"Over daintily on fasting days

"Sitting so long at table,

"Hereof, good God,

"Of all my vicious living

Then gan Glutton weep And vowed to fast:

"Never shall fish on Friday" Till Aunt Abstinence allows

"This showing shrift," says Repentance,

rebuked him for his sin, and swiftly asked for shrift, "Have pity on me, and all lives didst shape, confess me guilty,

how oft I cannot tell, So help me God Almighty,'

sometimes at breakfast-time, might well digest;

ere I had walked a mile,

spent upon the hungry.
I have eaten and have drunken;
I slept and ate at once.
grant me forgiveness
all my life long.'

and made great dole,
"Hungry and thirsty though
I be,
be eaten or swallowed
whom all my life I hated."

"shall be of merit to thee."

(PARSON SLOTH)

Then came Sloth, beslabbered,

"I must sit down," says he,
"I cannot stand or stoop,

"Once I am in bed,

"Till I am ripe for dinner."

with two slimy eyes,
"or I shall nap,
or kneel without a footstool,
no bell-ringing can rouse me

He began with a belch
And stretched him out and
yawned

"What, wake, man, wake," cried Repentance,

"Should I die, by this day,

"I know not my paternoster,

"I know rhymes of Robin Hood

"But of our Lord and of our Lady—none,

"I have made forty vows

"Never penance have I done

"And never was I sorry for my sins.

"If I tell my beads

"My heart is two miles away

"Each day am I busy,

"With idle tales at the ale,

"Gods passion and pain

"I never visited the weak

"I had liever hear loose talk

"Or laugh at lying tales,

"Than all that ever they wrote,

"Vigils and fast days

"I lie abed in Lent

"Till mattins and mass be done.

" If I hear the last word

"Save sickness makes me

"Do I confession make,

and beat his breast in penitence

—and then he snored.

"and haste thee to shrift."

I dread me sore, as the priest sings it,

and Randolph Earl of Chester,

not the shortest ever made.

and forgot them in the morning, as the priest bade me,

(unless I be in wrath), from the words of my mouth; holy days and others, and idle tales in church. on that I think seldom.

or fettered men in prisons, at a cobblers merrymaking, or slander my neighbour, Matthew, Mark, or Luke or John.

I can clean forget them all, with my leman in my arms,

Then I go to the Friars I hold myself satisfied.

not twice in ten years and then I tell not half my sins.

Q	0

"I have been priest and parson "But I cannot solfa or sing,

But I cannot solia or sing

"But I can find a hare,

"Better than construe the first Psalm

"I can hold a friendly meeting,

"But in mass book or Popes edict

"If I buy or borrow,

"I forget it as soon as bought;

"Six times or seven

"Thus have I served true men

"My servants wages go unpaid,

"When with wrath and wicked wish

"If a man do me service,

"I am unkind when he is courteous,

"I have and always had

"I am not lured with love;

for thirty winters past, or read a Latin life of saints; in a field or in a furrow,

or explain it to the parish. I can cast a shires accounts,

I cannot read a line.

unless the score be up against me, and if a man ask me I deny it with oaths.

it is sad on settling-day,

ten hundred times.

my workmen I pay. or help me in my need,

I cannot understand him.
the manners of a hawk,
there must be meat under the
thumb.

"The kindness my brother-Christian,

"I, Sloth, have forgotten it,

"By what I said and what I left unsaid.

"Many a time have I spoilt

"Bread, ale, butter,

"All wasted by my keeping them;

fish, flesh, and other food, milk and cheese,

showed me of old,

ay, sixty times have I,

and I have set my house a-fire.

"In my youth I ran about,

I gave me not to service,

"And ever since have been a beggar, all for my foul sloth, "O me, my barren, barren days."

"Repent thee," quoth Repentance, and with that Sloth swooned, Till Wake the watchman threw water in his eyes And flapped it on his face and said: "Beware thee of Despair for he would betray thee, "Say, 'I am sorry for my sin,' pray God for grace and beat thy breast; "No guilt so great His goodness is

Then sat Sloth up And vowed before God:

"(Save I be sick), "To the dear church

"Nor shall ale after dinner

"Till I have heard evensong:

"Ay and I will pay again "All that I made wickedly

"And though my living fail

"Every man shall have his own,

"And with the remnant,

"Before I pilgrim it to Rome,

and signed him ever and again, "No Sunday shall go by that I shall not early go and hear mass and mattins; keep me thence, by the Cross I swear it.

greater."

(if I the money have), since I had art to make it; yet I will not cease;

ere I go hence. by the Chester Rood, I will seek-Saint Truth."

THE PRAYER OF REPENTANCE FOR THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

Then had Repentance pity " For all sinful souls

"To mend you your misdeeds,

"God who of Thy goodness

and bad them all kneel: I pray our Saviour, to be merciful to all. of old made the world,

" Making all out of nothing, and making man like Thee, "And suffered man to do sin and brought sickness on us all as the Book telleth-"All for the best as I believe O blessed fault. O necessary sin of Adam, "For through that sin thy Son down to this earth was sent "And became man, son of a maid, mankind to save, "Thou that madest Thyself Thy Son like us in body and soul, I am in the Father and the Father in me and be that seeth me secth my Father. "Thou that with thy Son in our flesh didst die, "For mans sake on Good Friday and felt our sorrow, be led captivity captive, "When the sun for sorrow lost for a time his light, "When most light is at midfeeding our forefathers day; "At midday mealtime of thy saints with thy fresh blood, The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light. "The light that leapt from out thee blinded Lucifer, "And brought thy blessed from his power into the bliss of heaven; "Thou that on the third day in our mortal flesh didst go after "Where the sinner Mary saw before Mary thy mother, thee. " For comfort of the sinful thou sufferedst her to see thee first: 3 have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance, "All that Mark hath written, Matthew, Luke and John

"Of thy doughtiest deeds
The Word was made flesh.

all was done by thee as man;

"Thou to whom therefore

"Thou that wert first our Father

"And above all our Saviour:

"Thou that hast told us

" For our deeds done ill,

we may more surely pray,

and in thy flesh our Brother, BE MERCIFUL TO US.

when we be sorry

if we acknowledge them and cry,

"Damned we shall be never:

3 will not remember bis iniquities any more,

"Because of this Thy mercy,

"Have pity on these wicked men

"That ever they have angered thee,

Then seized Hope a horn

And blew it to the sound of

And all the saints in heaven
A thousand men crowded and
cried

For grace to go to Truth,—

for the love of Mary Thy mother,

that repent them sore

in word, or thought, or deed."

Lord - thou - shalt - turn - and quicken-us,

Blessed are they whose iniquity is forgiven, together sang the hymn,

to Christ and his dear mother God grant they may.

THE VISION OF THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH AND OF THE COMING OF PIERS PLOWMAN

THE VISION OF THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH

But no wight was so wise

They blustered forth like

beasts,

Long was the way and late

In pilgrims dress apparelled;

Bound with broad list

A bowl and bag,

And on his hat a hundred flasks of lead,

Many a cross from Sinai,

Cross-keys from Rome,

Signs of his pilgrimage,

that

that knew the way to Truth;

over the valleys and the hills; when they met a palmer, he had a staff in hand, like bindweed twisted round it, he bare at his side, of lead, scallop-shells of Spain, and the portraiture of Christ, that men might know his saints.

This folk required of him

- "From Sinai," says he,
- "Bethlehem, Babylon,
- "Ye may see by my signs,
- "Good saints have I sought
- "Walking full wide
- "Knowest thou a holy saint
- "Canst thou tell us the way
- "Nay, God bless me,"
- "Never saw I palmer
- "That asked after Truth

whence he had come;

"and from our Lords Sepulchre,
Alexandria, Armenia, and
Damascus;
that be upon my hat
for my souls health,
in wet and dry."

that men call TRUTH? where that saint dwelleth?"

said the fellow then, with pike-staff or with scrip till ye now in this place."

HERE FIRST APPEARETH PIERS PLOWMAN

- "By Peter," quoth a plowman, and forward put his head,
- "I know Truth as well
- "Conscience and my own wit
- " Made me his man
- "I have been his follower
- "Sown his seed,
- "Cared for his corn,
- "In his house, outside his house,
- "I ditch, I dig, I do,
- " Now I sow, and now I thresh,
- "I am his tailor and his tinker,
 "And though I myself do
- "And, though I myself do say it,
- "And I have good wage from him,
- "He is the readiest paymaster
- "Never withholds mans hire
- "He is gentle as a lamb,
- "If ye will know
- "I will show you the way home.

and forward put his head as scholar does his book. led me to his place, to serve him evermore; all this fifty winter,

herded his beasts,

carried it home,

watching his profit; ail that Truth biddeth me, now I weave, now I wind; he put me to learn all;

I am his good servant,

sometimes more than good; that poor man can know, past the evening time. lovely in speech; where Truth dwelleth

- "Yea, dear Piers," quoth they, and offered him money.
- "Nay, by my souls health,
- "I would not touch a farthing,
- " He would love me less
- "But if ye will to go right,

for all S. Thomas shrine, for were it told to Truth a long time after. this is the way thither.

"Ye must go through meekness,

all, men and women,

- "Till ye come to Conscience-Love-first-our-Lord-God
- " And-then-your-neighbour-next-and-as-you-would-
- " That-he-should-do-to-you-do-ye-to-him.
- "Bend by a brook,

Be-sweet-of-speech

" And find a ford	
" Wade in the water	,
" And we shall lean t	•

And ye shall leap the nimbler

"Then shalt thou see Swear-not-save-it-be-for-need

"Swear ye not idly

"Then shall ye come by a croft,

"It is called Covet-not-mens-goods-or-wives-or-servants.

"Break no branch there, "Two stocks stand there,

"Strike forth by both

"Turn at a hill,

"It is closed in with florins

"Pluck no plant there

"Then shalt thou see Say-sooth-

"Thou shalt come to a court

"The moat around is mercy,

"The walls of Wit

"The Creed its buttress.

"Halls and chambers

"The drawbridge of prayer,

"The door-hooks are of alms.

"The gatekeeper is Grace,

"Give him this token

"I HAVE PERFORMED MY PENANCE,

" AND SHALL BE WHEN I THINK ON THEM

"Bid Amendment ask his Lord

"To open and undo

"That Adam and Eve

Honour-your-father wash you well there, all your life after.

by the name of God Almighty.

enter not therein,

save it be thine own.

Steal-not, Slay-not,

and leave them on thy left.

Bear-no-false-witness and many another fee: on peril of thy soul.

and-nothing-else-for-any-man.

as bright as the sun,

the battlements of Christendom.

to hold Lust out,

and all the house is roofed, not with lead but with Love;

the pillars of penance,

his man is Amendment; TRUTH-KNOWS-SOOTH

I AM SORRY FOR MY SINS,

THOUGH I WERE A POPE.

to lift the wicket up the high gate of heaven against us all shut.

By Eve the door was shut to all, and by the Virgin Mary it again was opened.

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- "A full loyal lady
- "She hath the key of the lock,
- "And may lead in whom she will
- " And if God grant thee
- "Thou shalt find Truth
- "In a chain of charity
- "But beware of Wrath,
- " For he curseth him
- " And poketh in pride
- "Thy good deeds make thee bold,
- "Then shalt thou be driven forth,
- "Keyed and locked,
- " Haply a hundred winter
- "Think well of thyself
- "But there are seven sisters
- " Porters of the Posterns;
- " Humility, Charity, Chastity
- " Patience and Peace
- "Lady Almsgiving
- "She hath helped a thousand
- "Whoso is akin
- "Wondrous welcome is he
- "Who is not akin
- "It is full hard for you
- "By Christ," says a cut-purse, "Nor I," says a monkey-man,
- "God help me," says a cakemaker,
- "No foot further would I go
- "Yea," says Piers, "go ye on,"
- " Mercy is a maiden there,

unlocked it by her grace, tho the king slept,

as her love pleaseth her.

to go in in this wise, resting in thine heart, as tho thou wert a child; he is a wicked one, that in thy heart is sealed, to make thee praise thyself.

thine eyes are blinded,

and the door closed, to keep thee out. ere thou shalt enter; and thou mayst lose his love.

ever serving Truth
one called Abstinence,
be the chief maidens there;
help many a one,
lets in full many;
from the devils pinfold;
to these sisters seven
and received well;
to some of them
to get entrance at the gate."

- "no kin have I there,"
 for aught I know."
- "if I knew this for true for any friars sermon."

and pushed all the right way: mightiest of them all;

The Vision of the Search for Truth 101

- "She is akin to all the sinful,
- "And through their help
- "Thou mayst get her grace
- "Yea, I have bought a house," quoth one,
- "To see how it pleaseth me." Another needs must follow
- " And I must go at once
- "Therefore, I pray you, Piers,
- "Tell Truth I am excused."
- "And I have wedded a wife," says one,
- "Were I a sevennight from her sight
- "And lour on me and lightly chide
- "Therefore, Piers Plowman,
- "I cannot come for Kits sake,
- Quoth Contemplation,
- " Famine and trouble,
- "But the way is so bad
- "To follow us each foot
- "By S. Paul," says a Pardoner,
- "I will go fetch my box of writing
- "By Christ," says a woman of the streets,
- "Thou shalt say I am sister of thine

(She looks round and sees they two are alone)

"I know not where they be gone."

"I will come in thy company;

she and her son, -hope thou none otherif thou go but in time."

"and I must hie me thither He took his leave of Piers. five yoke of oxen, and drive them straight; if perchance ye meet him

"wanton in her ways,

she would fall into sin,

and say I love another; I pray thee tell Truth she cleaveth so to me."

"Though I suffer woe, I will follow Piers, unless we had a guide for dread of mis-turnings."

" perchance I am not known there;

and my bishops letters."



THE VISION OF PIERS COUNSEL

THEN says Perkin Plowman:

- " I have half-an-acre to plough
- "Had I ploughed my half-acre
- "I would wend with you,
- by the high way; and sown it afterward, I would show you the way."
- "That were a long waiting time,"
- "What should we women
- "Some shall sew the sacks,
- " And ye wives that have wool,
- " And spin it speedily,
- "Save it be holiday
- "Look forth your linen,
- "See the needy and the naked,
- "Throw clothes upon them,
- "For I shall give the poor a living
- " For the Lords love in heaven,

"By S. Peter of Rome

said a veiled lady, work meanwhile?"

for fear the wheat be spilt, work it fast, spare not your fingers, or a saints vigil. labour ye hard on it, take thought how they lie; Truth would love that,

as long as I live unless the land fail.

"And ye lovely ladies, "Take silk and sendal,

"Chasubles for chaplains

"Wives and widows,

- " Make cloth, I counsel you,
- "Conscience biddeth you
- " For the profit of the poor
- " And for all manner men
- "Help them to work well,

with your long fingers, and sew while there be time the churches to honour.

spin your flax and wool, and teach your daughters so. to make the cloth and for pleasure to yourselves, that live by meat and drink who win your food for you."

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Piers Plowman

- "By Christ," says a gentleman,
- "But on this theme truly
- "But lead me," says he,
- " I will help thee labour
- "Surely, Sir Knight,
- " And all my life
- "If thou wilt keep
- "From the wasters and the wicked
- "Go thou and hunt
- "The boars and badgers,
- " And tame thy falcons
- "That come to my croft
- Courteously the knight replied:
- "By my power, Piers,
- "To fulfil the covenant
- "But yet one point," says
- "Trouble not thy tenants,
- "And though ye be right to fine
- "And let meekness be your master
- "And though the poor proffer you
- "Take them not; perchance
- "Thou shali pay it all again
- "In the full perilous place
- "Do no harm to thy bondman,
- "He is here thine underling,
- "He may be better set
- "Save thou do work

Friend, go up bigher.

"he teacheth us the best, never was I taught, "and I will learn to plough while my life lasteth."

I shall toil for both of us, will labour for love of thee, my church and me

that would us destroy. the hares and foxes, that break my hedges down; wild birds to kill, and crop my wheat."

I plight thee my troth, while I may stand."

"I ask thee more; save Truth assenteth,

let mercy be your tax-master,

for all that Meed may do;

presents and gifts ye do not them deserve: at the years end, named Purgatory.

that it be well with thee, but it may hap in heaven and happier too than thou, and live as thou shouldst.

I IIC V ISIOII OI	ricis Counser		
"At church and in the charnel vault "Or whether one he Owen or	churls be hard to tell		
"Or whether one be Queen or quean	knight or knave.		
"Be thou true of thy tongue, "Save of wisdom and sense "Tales of kindness	and hate all tales, to chasten thy workmen, of battles or of Truth.		
"Hold not with the loose storiers, "Avoid them at thy meat	they are the devils talkers;		
time.	Dost thou understand?"		
"I assent," says the knight,	" while my life dureth."		
"And I," says Piers, "shall apparel me "And wend with you I will "I will cast clothes on me, "My stockings, my cuffs, "And hang my basket round my neck, "And a bushel of bread-corn wi "I will sow it myself, "On pilgrimage, as palmers do, "My ploughfoot shall my pikestaff be, "And help my hoe to cut "And all that help me plough a "Shall have leave by our Lord "And make merry with their winning,	and then with you will wend my pardon to win. to pick the roots in two, and cleanse the furrows.		
"And all kind of craftsmen "I will find them food "Saving Jack the Juggler,	that can live by Truth, who live faithfully,—and Janet of the Stews,		

"And the ribald Robert

"And Friar the beggar,

"Truth told me once and had me tell it after him."

They shall be blotted from the book of life.

" No tithe shall be taken, no tithe be asked of them

They shall not be written with the rightcous.

"They are in luck; they need

not pay;

"Now am I old and hoar,

"On pilgrimage and in penance

"And, ere I wend,

God mend them.

for his filthy words,

and Daniel the dicer,

I have goods of my own, will I pass with all these others will write my will and testament."

THE TESTAMENT OF PIERS PLOWMAN

"In the name of God, amen,

I make this testament myself.

"He shall have my soul,

"And defend it from the Fiend.

"Till I come to his account,

"And gain forgiveness of my debts

"On that remission I believe.

that all souls made, for so is my faith, as my Creed telleth me,

and remission of my sins;

"The Church shall have my body

"Of my corn and of my substance;

"I paid her readily,

"She is bound, I hope,

"And keep me in her memory

and shall keep my bones,

I paid her my tithes, for peril of my soul; to bear me in mind. with all Christian souls.

"My wife shall have that I earned,

" And share it with my friends,

"Though I should die to-day,

earned with truth and no more, and my dear children. my debts are paid;

- "I bare back all I borrowed
- " And with the residue,
- " I will honour Truth with it
- "For poor mens sake."

Now are Piers and the pilgrims To plough his half-acre; Ditchers and delvers Thereat was Piers pleased Others there were Each man in his way And some to please Perkin

At high prime Piers And himself looked over all He should be hired again

Some did their work thus; And helped to plough the halfacre

- "Now by the prince of Paradise,"
- " If ye rise not straightway
- " No grain that groweth here
- "Nay though ye die for dole

Then were idlers afeard,
Some crooked their legs beneath
them,

And made their moan to Piers

- "But, Piers, we will pray for you,
- "That God in His grace
- "And pay you back for all your alms
- "We, we can neither toil nor sweat,

ere I went home to bed, by Chester Rood, and be his pilgrim at the plough, (The narration proceeds)

to the ploughing gone, many a one helped him, dug up the ridges, and paid their full wages. that worked full willingly, found him work to do, picked away the weeds.

let the plough stand to see who best had wrought, in harvest time.

they sat and sang and drank, with, "Hey trolly lolly."

says Piers in his wrath, and haste you to work, shall gladden you at need, —devil take him that cares."

and feigned them to be blind,

as such beggars can, how that they could not work.

for you and for your plough, will multiply your grain,

that you have given us here;

such sickness aileth us."

IIO

- "If ye were good," says Piers,
- "But high Truth will have no tricks
- "Ye be wastrels, I know well,
- "All that good land-tilling men
- "But Truth shall teach you
- "Or barley bread shall be your food
- "But if any be blind,
- "He shall eat wheaten bread,
- "Till God in his goodness

"your prayers might help me well,

in folk that go a-begging. wasting and devouring lawfully toil for.

how to drive his team:-

and the brook give you drink.

broken-shanked, iron-bolted, and drink as well as I, send him better days."

- "But ye, ye could work as Truth would; ye could earn meat and drink,
- "Keeping kine in the field,
- "Ditching and delving,
- "Helping to make mortar,
- "In lechery, in lying,
- "And only through sufferance
- "Hermits and anchorites,
- "They shall have of my alms
- " And friars that flatter not,
- "What! I and mine shall find them
- "But Robert Gadabout
- "Nor preachers, saving they can preach
- "They shall have bread and pottage
- "Religion is unreasonable

keeping beasts from the corn, threshing the sheaves, or bearing muck afield.

and in sloth ye live, doth Vengeance pass you by. that keep them in their cells, all the while I live, and poor sick folks,

all that they need.

he shall have nought of me

and have the bishops leave,

and make themselves at ease, that hath no certain pay."

Then gan a wastrel rise in wrath

and would have fought with Piers,

Threw down his glove, Bad Piers go with his plough

"Wilt thou or wilt thou not,
"Of thy flour and of thy flesh,
"Ay and make merry with it

we will have our will will take it when we please, for all thy grudging."

a Breton man, a braggart,

for a cursed starveling.

Then PIERS PLOWMAN
To keep him as his covenant
was

"Avenge me of these wastrels
"There be no plenty in the land

Courteously the knight,
Warned wastrels all
"Or thou shalt dear aby it,
"I shall beat thee by the law
"I was not wont to work,"
says Wastrel,
Made light of the law,
Piers was worth a peascod,
And threatened Piers and his
men

"By my souls peril,"
"I will repay you all
And shouted after Hunger,
"Take vengeance on these
wastrels,

Hunger came in haste, Wrung him by the womb,

He buffeted the Breton man That he looked like a lantern He beat both the boys, complained him to the knight,

from the wolfish wastrels: that make the world so dear,

and the plough lieth still."

as his manner was, and had them do better: by my knightly order, and bring thee to the stocks."

"and I will not begin." set less by the knight, he and his plough,

when next they met.

says PIERS PLOWMAN, for your proud words," (Hunger heard him soon),

for the knight will not."

took Wastrel by the mouth, brought water to his eyes.

about both his cheeks, all his life after. he near burst their ribs.

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Had not Piers with a pease loaf prayed Hunger cease They had like been in their graves.

- "Have mercy on them, Hunger, and let me boil them beans,
- "Suffer them to live,
- "What was baked for my horses

and let me boil them beans, and let them eat with hogs; shall be their food."

Idlers for fear of this
Flapped away with flails,
That Hunger was not bold
enough
For a potful of peases
A heap of hermits
Cut their copes away,
Went out as workmen
Digging and ditching;

fled into barns, from morning to evening,

to cast an eye on them that Piers wife made them. took them spades, made them short coats, to weed and mow,

to drive Hunger away.

Blind and bedridden
Lame men he cured
They that lay broken legged,
On soft warm Sundays
Them Hunger healed

Spaded, spread dung,

were healed by the thousand, with lungs of beasts; sitting to beg silver, by the high way, with a red-hot cake.

Lame mens limbs
They became servants
And prayed for charity
For the sake of his bread
For what was baked for the horses
And many a beggar ready
And every poor man well paid

were loosened and lithe; to keep Piers beasts, to dwell with him, to drive Hunger away.

was food for the hungry, to sweat for beans, to take pease for his hire, to do Piers bidding.

Piers was proud of that Daubing and delving, Gave them meat and money Then had Piers pity

Ready as a sparrowhawk

and put them all to work, whittling wooden pins, as they might deserve; on all poor people, And bade Hunger in haste Home to his own place

"I am well avenged," says he,

"Yet I pray thee

"What is best to be done

"For well I wot when thou art gone

" Mischief it maketh,

" For default of food,

" Not for love do they work

"There is no final love in them

"Yet be they my brethren,

"Truth taught me once

" And help them in all things

"Now would I know of thee

"How I may master them

"Hear now," quoth Hunger,

"Bold and big beggars

"Thin them down with beans

"And if the men grumble

" The sweeter shall their supper be

"And if thou find any folk

"Or fire or evil men,

"Comfort them with thy goods,

"Love them, lend to them, Bear pe one anothers burdens.

" And all kind of men

"Love them and blame them not

hie out of the land, and keep him ever there,

wastrels through thy power,

ere thou wend

with bidders and beggars

ill will they work. for now they be so weak, this folk is at my will.

but for fear of famine.

for all their fair speeches, God bought us all.

to love each one of them after their need.

what were the best, and make them work."

"and hold my words wisdom,

that well can work

with horse bread and hounds bread,

bid them to work

when they have earned it.

that ill fortune hath harmed, try such to know;

for Christs love in heaven, Gods law teacheth so.

in mischief and disease,

-let God take vengeance-

"Though they have evil done —let God alone for that vengeance is mine, and 3 will repay.

"And if thou wilt be dear to God

do as the Gospel teacheth.

" Make thee loved among the

so shalt thou get grace;

Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness.

"God I would not grieve," said Piers, "for all the gold in earth,

" May I do as thou sayest

and yet sinless be?"

"Yea, I bid thee," says Hunger, "or else the Bible lieth, "Go to Genesis the beginning With swynk and swot Toil thou and travel

the father of us all." and sweating face and truly win thy living.

"And Wisdom saith the same I saw it in the Bible. The sluggard would not plough for sloth: be shall beg in winter and it shall not be given bim.

" Matthew with a mans face

"To three manner of men

" And he that best laboured

" And for his labouring

"The wicked servant had a talent

"Nothing had he of his master ever more after.

tells of one that lent. to traffick with, to profit by, was best allowed. was lord of his lords goods,

but as he would not work

that every wight should work

"Common sense wills

"In ditching or in digging,

in teaching or in prayer, "Life active or life contemplative.

"The man that feedeth himself

"He is blessed by the Book For thou shalt eat the labour of thy bands, etcetera.

"By Christ," quoth Piers the Plowman.

in faithful labour in body and in soul."

"these sentences will I show

- "To the beggars and the boys
- "But yet I pray you of your charity
- "Teach it me, my dear,
- "Work not for a whole week
- "Ye have eaten over much," quoth Hunger,
- "I bid thee drink no day
- "And eat not I bid thee
- " And send thee his sauce
- "Keep some till supper time,
- Keep some till supper till
- " Arise ere appetite
- "Let not Lord Surfeit
- "For he is lecherous
- "And after many kinds of meat
- "Dives for his delicate life
- "And Lazarus the lean
- "(And yet he gat them not,
- "Yet, since, I saw him sit,
- "In all manner of ease,
- "And if thou be a man of power,
- "To all that cry at thy gate
- "Give them of thy bread,
- "Give them of thy loaf,
- "And though liars and latchlifters
- "Let them bide till the board
- "But bear no crumbs to them,
- "Till thy needy neighbours
- "If thus thou diet thee
- "Physick shall sell his furred hood

that are so loth to work;

if ye know any leechcraft, for some of my servants so much our body acheth."

"that maketh you groan. ere thou have somewhat eaten, ere hunger take thee; to taste with thy lips. sit not too long, hath gotten his fill.

sit down at thy table, and of lickerish tongue, he is an-hungerd still.

to the devil went, that longed for the crumbs, for I, Hunger, killed him), as he a Lord were, in Abrahams lap;

Piers, I counsel thee, for food for love of God, thy pottage and thy sauce, yea, though thou have less to chew,

and lollers go on knocking be put aside,

have made their meal.

I will wager both mine ears

to get him food withal,

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Piers Plowman

"And shall pawn for his dinner And be fain to let his physick

go

"For many doctors be murderers

"And men die through their drinks

"By S. Paul," quoth Piers,

"Wend thy way when thou wilt

"This is a lovely lesson,

"I will not hence," says Hunger,

Says Piers "I have no penny

"No, neither goose nor pig,

"A few curds, a little cream,

" And two loaves of beans and bran

"And, by my soul, I say

"No nor a cookboy

"But I have parsley, cabbage, leeks

" And a mare to draw the dung afield

"And on this living we must live

"By then I hope to have

"Then may I do thee thy dinner

But all the poor people Their beans and baken apples,

Onions and salads, And prepared Piers this present

his Italian cloak,

and labour with his hands;

(God mend them)

ere destiny would have it."

"thou pointest nigh the truth,

and be it well with thee; Lord grant thee recompence."

" ere I have dined and drunk."

pullets for to buy, but only two green cheeses, and a haver-cake,

baked for my little ones; I have no salt bacon, collops to make,

and a cow and a calf,

while the drought lasteth;

till Lammas time, harvest in my croft,

as I fain would do."
fetched their peascods,
they brought them in their
laps,
and many ripe cherries.

and many ripe cherries, to please Hunger withal. Hunger ate it all in haste, Then poor people for fear With pease and green onions and asked for more, fed Hunger gladly; they thought to poison him.

By this it came near harvest time, Then folk were fain With good ale as Glutton bad,

new corn was in the market, feed Hunger with the best, and made Hunger go sleep.

Then would not the wastrels
work
Nor would beggars eat
But stamped bread, fine bread,
They would no halfpenny ale,

but wandered about, bread with beans in it, clean wheaten bread; but of the best and brownest.

Labourers with no land Deigned not to dine No penny a gallon did for them But pork, fish or fresh flesh, And that chaud, plus chaud, but only their hands work on day-old vegetables; nor a piece of bacon, fried or baked, for the chill of their maw.

And but he has high wages And bewail the day else will he chide,
he ever became a working
man;
and all his Parliament,
to keep the labourer down.

Curses the king with a will, That make such laws

none then would chide,

But while Hunger here was lord

Nor strive against the statute book,

But I warn you all ye workmen

Hunger is fast coming

Hunger shall wake and come with floods

Ere few years are fulfilled

so stern did Hunger look. earn while ye can, hitherward again,

to chasten the wastrel, famine shall arise.

NESS

So saith Saturn and sent me to warn you

WHEN YE SEE THE SUN

AMISS, AND TWO MONKS HEADS,

AND A MAIDEN BE QUEEN, THEN MULTIPLY BY

EIGHT,

THE PLAGUE SHALL GO

AWAY HOME, DEARTHSHALLBE JUDGE,

AND DAN THE DITCHER SHALL DIE FOR HUNGER,

SAVE GOD IN HIS GOOD-

GRANT US A TRUCE.

THE VISION OF GODS BULL OF PARDON

THE VISION OF GODS BULL OF PARDON

TRUTH heard tell of all
And bid him take his team
And brought him a Pardon,
For Piers and for Piers heirs
"Bide thou at home," said
Truth,
And all that should help Piers
Or do aught else,
To them Truth granted;

Kings and knights
Who fule the people
They have Pardon too,
And fellowship in paradise

And consecrated bishops, If they preach to the people

And, if they can, amend
And dread no lords,
And are bitter on bad men,
And fear not to put down,
Lechery among lords
They are one with the apostles;

And they sit on the high thrones

he sent to Piers and till the earth Pardon and forgiveness, for evermore.

"and plough thy field;" to set or sow Pardon perpetual PARDON,—WITH PIERS.

that Holy Church defend, in their realms righteously, light purgatory, with patriarchs and prophets.

if their lives be holy,
to love God and their neigh
bour,
all sinful souls,
and are mild to the good,
unless they repent,
as far as they may,
and their evil ways,
PIERS PARDON PROVES
IT,

at the Judgment Day.

And merchants—in the margin—had many a year remitted,

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But no full pardon

And why? They keep not holy days They swear, "By my soul, And sell their goods with oaths (the Pope granted them not that)

as they are bidden, God help me it is so," and their clean consciences defile

But under secret seal "Buy your goods boldly, "And sell when ye will,

"But use ye your winnings "To maintain the scholar,

"To dower girls

"To build the broken bridge,

"To help the monks,

" And I will send you

"And never a fiend shall frighten you

" For I will save you

"And bring your souls in safety

Then were merchants merry And praised Piers Plowman

The least pardon of all Who pleaded for bribes Truth sent them a letter: buy when ye will, and take your winnings, to rebuild almshouses, to help the stricken, or make them nuns, and mend the bad road, and make rents reasonable, Michael my archangel,

or harm you at your death; from all despair,

to my saints in joy."

and wept for gladness, for the Pardon he had gotten.

had the Men of Law, and condemned the innocent.

Lawyers should take pains to plead And princes and bishops Thou shalt not take aifts upon the innocent.

for the innocent and help them should pay the lawyers fee.

But many a magistrate, Will do more for John But a lawyer that spendeth his speech

and many a jury, than for Gods love,

and speaketh for the poor

The Vision of Gods Bull of Pardon 122

The innocent and needy poor Who comforteth the poor And declareth law No devil on his deathbed The Psalter beareth witness, Lord, who shall dwell . . .

that never hath harmed any, and taketh no fee, for our Lords love, shall have him a whit, he and his soul are safe.

For who would buy or sell These four our Heavenly Father

Treasures of Truth And never shall they wax or wane

water, wind, or wit, or fire, gave to his sheep for common use, the true to help,

save by Gods will.

Ye who plead for the poor Ye lawyers, ye advocates, When ye draw near to death, Your pardon at your parting

S. Matthew bids me tell you

and take money at their hands, be sure of this: and pray for pardon,

will be but small;

this and if I lie blame him.

Whatever ge would that men should do to you, do ge also unto them.

But for all that labour for their lives, Fair work, fair wages, These have the Pardon perpetual

humbly living, PIERS PLOWMANS PAR-DON.

Tramps and beggars,

Except their beggary be true, Else they be false as hell, And beguile the giver, Would give to the poor indeed Cato knoweth these men well See to whom thou givest.

nay, their names are not there, and their plea fair, and they defraud the needy, who, if he knew the truth, and help the neediest of all. and the master of stories

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And again

keep thine alms in thine band and watch to whom thou givest

But yet Gregory the good bad us give to all for Him that gave us all.

Choose not whom thou shalt pity.

Ye know not who is worthy,
The treason is in him that
taketh,
For the giver giveth,
Beggars are ever borrowers,
Who giveth to them that gave

God knoweth who hath need; if treason be, and the beggar borroweth,

Beggars are ever borrowers, their surety is almighty God, Who giveth to them that gave —and their interest—
Why didst thou not give my money to the bank . . ?

Beg not, beggars, Whoso hath money to buy him bread, save ye have great need,

he hath enough.

The neediest are our neighbours
Prisoners in the dungeon,
Charged with a crew of children
What they win by their spinning
Milk and meal

ning
Milk and meal,
The babes that continually
This they must spend
Ay and themselves
With woe in winter
In the narrow room
Carding, combing, clouting,
washing,
Pitiful is it to read

Ay and many another Ashamed to beg,

if we give heed to them, the poor in the cottage, and with a landlords rent.

to make their porridge with, to satisfy the babes,—
cry for food—
on the rent of their houses, suffer with hunger, rising a-nights, to rock the cradle, rubbing, winding, peeling rushes.

the cottage-womens woe,
that puts a good face on it,
ashamed to let neighbours
know

All that they need, Many the children, To clothe and feed them; And many mouths

Bread and thin ale Cold flesh and cold fish A farthings worth of mussels, Were a feast for them It were charity to help these To comfort the cottager,

But for beggars with their bags, Save they be blind or broken, Reck not, ye rich, For every man that hath his health, his eyes and his limbs If he useth a lollers life

Yet are there other beggars, But they want wit, Lunatic lollers. Mad as the moon changes, Caring for neither cold nor heat, As Peter and Paul wandered But many a time prophesying, Yet since God is strong enough To give to each man And lets them go, these lunatics, His apostles, He sent them silverless, With neither bread nor baggage. Barefoot go these disciples, If they meet the mayor They reverence him not. Such men we should have home,

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noontide and evening. and nought but a mans hands and few pennies come in, to eat the pennies up.

for them are a banquet, are like roast venison, a farthings worth of cockles on Friday or fast-days, that be at heavy charges, the crooked and the blind.

whose churches are the taverns, or else sick, but let such wastrels starve; he liveth against Gods law.

in health enow, men and women, leaping around, witless, moneyless,

wandering walkers, yet preaching not, to please themselves it seems.

wit, wealth and health, they are, I think, his private disciples; in summer raiment clad,

begging of men, amidst the street, no, no more than another.

and help them when they come.

They are merry singers, heavens minstrels,
Gods boys, jesters, as the Bible saith;
I any man is seen to be wise let bim be made a tool that be be wise.

It is the way of the rich
For the lords and ladies sake
Men suffer all they say
Ay and give them gifts and
gold,
Right so, ye rich,
Gods minstrels, Gods messengers
These lunatic lollers
For under Gods secret seal

They carry no bags,

They are not like the lollers Slyly lurking Hoping to sit at eventide Uncross their legs Resting them, roasting them, Drinking to the last drop, And when they will and please, And, when they rise, roam out, Where they may get a breakfast, Silver or sod meat A loaf, half a loaf, And home they carry it And live in idleness Every fellow of their flock Bag at his back, And yet knows some kind of craft,

Could get him bread and ale

And yet lives like a loller

to keep all manner of minstrels, in whose house they stay, and take it in good part,

ere they go thence, ye should welcome and honour

and Gods merry jesters. that leap around you hidden are their sins.

they hide no bottles, and the hermits false, to catch mens alms. by the house fire, and lie at their ease, turning round to the fire, slowly turning to bcd, in morning to arise, and easily espy

first a round of bacon, and sometimes both, a lump of cheese, to their hovels while others work. that wanders about, beggar-fashion,

which, if he would, and a suit of raiment —Gods law damns him.

- "Lollers living in sloth,
- "Are not in my Pardon
- "The Book blameth all beggary,

3 bave been young and now am old yet bave 3 not seen

It needeth none And tell these lollers It blameth all beggars, They live in no love, They wed no women They bring forth bastards, They break a childs back, And go a-begging with infants There are more mis-shapen Than in all other trades

They that live this life In penance or in prayer.

But old white-headed men, And women with child, The blind, the bed-ridden, And all poor sufferers, Lepers and the truly poor, Prisoners, pilgrims, Men slandered on the sly Men brought to poverty Who take their mischief meekly, For their humility Penance and purgatory And Α PARDON WITH PIERS, And all holy hermits

But hermits that dwell And in inns among brewers, and country stalkers, till they be amended.

it banneth it thus; the righteous forsaken or his seed begging their bread.

to preach anon what the Bible meaneth; be ye full certain, they keep no law, with whom they have to do, beggars like themselves, they break his bones, for evermore after; among such beggars, that walk this world.

have no part in Pardon

that be helpless and needy, that cannot work, the halt and lame, quiet under Gods sending, and men fallen on evil days, and robbed men, and their goods lost, by fire or flood, and mildly at heart, our Lord hath granted here on earth, PARDON AND FORGIVE-NESS, shall have the same.

by the roadside, that beg in churches,

Seeking all that holy hermits Such as riches, reverence, (These lollers and latchlifters Now, naturally, by Christ, For by English of elders He that lolleth is lame, Is maimed in some member, Even so truly Loll against the Creed Where see ye them on Sundays As at mattins in the morning Or labouring for their living But at midday mealtime Coming in a cope, And for the cloth upon him He washeth and wipeth When he worked in this world He sat at the side-bench No wine came then his way Nor blanket on his bed The cause of all this caitiffry Who suffer such sloth

"Piers," quoth a priest then, "I will construe each clause for thee

Piers at his prayer And I stood behind them both All in two lines it lay, They that have done good shall go to life eternal But they that have done evil to everlasting fire "In sooth," says the priest then, "Only-'Do well and fare well--

hate and despise, and rich mens alms, covet it all) be such called lollers, and old mens teaching his leg out of joint, it meaneth some mischief; such manner of hermits and the Law of Holy Church. the service to hear, till mass begin? as the law would? I meet with them oft, as if they clergy were, he is called Friar; and sitteth with the best. and won his meat honestly, and at the second table; through the long week, nor white bread before him. cometh from many bishops and other sins to reign.

"thy Pardon I must read, and teach it thee in English."

unfolded his Pardon,

and beheld all the bull, not a letter more.

"I can see no Pardon here,

and-God shall save thy soul-

The Vision of Gods Bull of Pardon 129

- Do evil and fare evilto hell shalt thou wend-- Hope for nought else-after thy death day." ---And Piers for pure anger pulled the Pardon in two And, says he, If I walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fcar no evil for Thou art with me. "I shall cease my sowing," quoth Piers, "and work not so hard, "And I shall not be so busy about by belly and its joys, "I will weep, not sleep, though I eat no wheaten bread, "The prophet ate his bread in penance and in sorrow, "And many another as the psalter saith, "That loveth God loyally his living is simple. My tears have been my meat day and night. by the fowls of the air, "And Luke teacheth us "Not to be too busy about the worlds bliss, "And showeth us by example how to teach ourselves; "The fowls in the field, who finds them meat in winter? "No garner to go to have they, God findeth for them all." "What," quoth the priest, "thou art learned then. "Who taught thee, Perkyn, to read thy book?" "Abbess Abstinence," says Piers. " taught me a.b.c. "Conscience followed, and taught me much more." "Wert thou only a priest, Piers, thou mightest preach anywhere, "Doctor of Divinity and for thy text The fool bath said. "Ignorant loon," says Piers, "little lookest thou on thy Bible, "Seldom hast thou beheld King Solomons saws"

Cast out the scorner and his scorning with him.

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The priest and Piers I through their words awoke, And saw the sun in the south Meatless and moneyless, I mused upon this dream,

jangled of the Pardon, and waited about, sinking at even. on Malvern Hills, and went upon my way.

made me to study,

Many a time hath this dream For love of PIERS PLOW-MAN

pensive in my heart, for the comfort of all people, oft I see them fail, bid us to leave them.

And for his Pardon, And how the priest reviled it with "The fool hath said— But I have no care of dreams; Cato and Church lawyers Care not for dreams. Yet the Bible, the Book, How Daniel divined To Nebuchadnezzar, And Daniel said, "Sir king, "Strange knights shall come

it beareth witness, for a king his dream, so named by the learned; the dream is this; and cleave thy kingdom, thy land be parted;" it fell out indeed and humbler men took it.

"And among humbler lords "And as he divined "The king lost his lordship,

> —the sun and moon bowed all to him,-'Beau fils,' quoth he, shall seek thee in our need."

"Ay, and Joseph dreamed "And the eleven stars "Then Jacob judged him:

> in Pharaohs time, and governed Egypt, his friends sought Joseph.

somewhat of dreams, when men should sleep,

"' In famine we all

and the Pardon that he had, and reasoned it away, had need of no indulgence,

So befel it Joseph was justice As his father had said, All this maketh me think Many a time at midnight think on PIERS THE PLOWMAN

And how the priest attacked it But I deem that Do-well

Nor of pardon for two years,
Or Bishops letters.

Do-well at Doomsday is worthily received
And doth without any pardon
The pope hath no power to grant a
For men without penance to pass to
This is a leaf out of my creed as learned
That pardon and penance and praye
Souls that have sinned seven time
But for your three-years

Therefore, I counsel you, Who trust for your treasure

It is not so certain for a soul

Be ye not bold enough

pardon,

And specially, ye masters,
Ye that have the worlds
wealth,
When ye purchase pardon,
At the dreadful Doomsday,
And all come before Christ
How did we lead our lives,
How did we day by day,
Though ye be a Brother
Though ye have a pocket full,
And Doublefold Indulgences,
Your patents and your pardons

Therefore I counsel Christian souls,

And Mary his mother

That God give us grace,

pardon for three years,

of S. Peters church, to grant a pardon, to pass to Paradise, as learned men teach me. eartb . . .

God forbid otherwise, and prayer do save seven times and deadly;

truly, methinks, as Do-well is.

ye rich upon this earth,
to have your three-years
pardons,
to break the Ten Commandments,
ye mayors and judges,

and be holden wise, and papal bulls, when the dead shall rise, to give account, how did we keep the laws, this the judgment will rehearse. of all the Orders Five, Pardons and Absolutions, unless Do-well can help you, will be worth—a piecrust.

Cry God mercy to be our go-between ere we go hence,

Such works to work, That after our death day At the day of doom,

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while we be here,
Do-well may say
we did as he taught.
Amen.

Here endeth Williams Vision of Piers Plowman.

(A brief abstract follows of the books not fully transcribed.)

THE VISIONS OF DO-WELL, DO-BETTER AND DO-BEST

THE VISIONS OF DO-WELL, DO-BETTER AND DO-BEST

DO-WELL

Thus robed in russet All a summer season And oft I asked Where Do-well was Never wight as I went Till on a Friday For they be men Through countries, courts, Princes palaces, And know Do-well—and Do-evil.

I roamed about, Do-well to seek, the folk I met and what man he might be. could tell me where, two Friars I saw; that walk most widely and many kinds of places, and poor mens cots,

"Among us," quoth they,

"And ever hath been

"Nay," said I, "man sins

"Therefore he is not alway

"that man is dwelling and ever shall be."

seven times a day, among you Friars, "He is elsewhere now and then and teacheth the people."

"My son," said the Friar,

" How the good man sinneth

"I shall soon show thee seven times a day.

"Set a man in a boat

"The wind and the water

"Make him stumble, if he stand

"Through steering the boat

"Yet is he safe and sound

on a broad water: and boat wagging

never so stiffly; he bendeth and boweth, so is it with the righteous:

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"Though he fall he falleth not, —he is in the boat—

"And he is safe and sound.

"Thus is it with men;

"Goods are the great waves,

"The boat is our body;

"And thro the fiend and the flesh

"The just man sinneth

"But deadly sin he doth not,

"He strengtheneth man stand

" And though thy body bow

"Yet is thy soul safe."

"Nay I cannot understand

"But if I live and look about me

"Christ keep thee," quoth he;

"And give you grace

Thus I went wide-where, In a wide wilderness, Bliss of the birds song And on a lawn under a linden To listen to their lays. The mirth of their mouths And mid that bliss

the water is the world, wallowing about,

and the frail world seven times a day.

Do-well him guardeth,

and steereth his soul, as boat doth in the water,

all your wise words,

I shall go learn better."

and I said, "Christ keep you good men to be."

walking alone, by a wood side. made me abide there, I leaned awhile their lovely notes; made me to sleep, I dreamed—marvellously.

Thought came and gave me over to Wit to tell me where dwelt Do-well. And Wit told me, "In a castle near, watched by Sense, and the Castles name is Flesh;" and Wit spoke much to me on the foolishness of man. But Wits wife came, named Study, lean of body, and wondrous wroth with him. Quoth she,

"Wise art thou, Wit,

"To fools or flatterers

wisdom to tell or frantic folk." She blamed him, she banned him,

"Cast not your pearls to hogs;

"Wisdom and Wit now

"Save when carded with covetise

"Whoso can contrive deceit,

"Lead a merry meeting

"His counsel is called for."

she bad him be still, they have their haws. are not worth a cress

as clothiers comb their wool; conspire to wrong,

and Truth beguile,

It was so in Jobs time, it is so to-day, said she. They that preach the truth are little cared for. You find men arguing of Christ, arguing of the Trinity, drivelling about the Deity when their belly is full.

"But the careful cry

"Hungry, thirsty,

" None calls him nearer

"They shoo him off as a hound

"God is not in that house

and call at their gates, chilly quaking, his woes to amend,

and bid him go, nor His help neither.

"The learned talk of God,

of God, and His name is on their lips

"But the poor have Him in their heart.

"God is deaf now-a-days

"And prayers have no power

"Yet the wretches of this world

"Nor for dread of death w

"Nor share their plenty with the poor;

"But in gaiety, in gluttony

"And the more they win,

"And lord it over lands,

and deigneth not hear us, the Plague to stay,

take no heed of it, withdraw them from pride,

they glut themselves with wealth,

wealth and riches, the less they part with.

"Hast thou much, spend generously;

so says the Book,

- "Whoso hath little spend as he may.
- "We have no warrant of our lives
- "These lessons, lords
- " And not to fare
- " From one feast to another
- "And hate abiding at home;
- " Miserable is the hall
- " Now have the rich a rule
- "In a private parlour
- "Because of the poor in the hall."

how long they be, should love to hear, like fiddlers or Friars at other mens houses

where lord and lady will not sit; to eat by themselves, or in a chamber with a chimney

Thus Study railed at her husband and at me.

And when Wit was ware He was dumb as death And smiled and louted In sign I should

"Mercy," said I, "madame,

"To work your will

"Tell me what is Do-well."

what the dame said, and drew him back, and looked at Study, her grace beseech.

your man I am, while my life lasteth.

"For thy meekness, man,
"I will send thee to my

"Give Clergy this sign;

"And greet his wife Scripture,

"Logic I taught her,

"Grammar for boys

"And would they learn not

"I made tools

"For carpenters, carvers,

"Taught them level and line,

"But Theology wearied me

"The more I muse thereon

and thy mild speech,

Clergy and Scripture.

I set him to school
I taught her all,
music I taught her,
I bad men write,
I beat them with a broom;
for every craft,
and the compass for masons;
though now I look blind.
ten score times,
the mistier it seemeth."

Then I thanked her and went on my way to Learning (Clergy) and got his words. He told me Do-well was to believe the articles of the faith; but his talk was long.

"Ye show me but darkly

" Many tales ye tell me, "That I was made man

"In the Legend of Life

"Or else un-entered in the Book

"This is a long lesson," quoth I, "and little am I the wiser, where Do-well or Do-better is: taught by Theology, and my name entered long ere I was born,

for some wickedness of mine."

But, I said, I find the unexpected in heaven and the builders of holy church in danger of being lost, as were the carpenters of Noahs ark who never got inside.

"On Good Friday I find

"That all his life had lived

"Yet for he repented him

"He was sooner saved

"Or than Adam or Isaiah

"That had lain with Lucifer

" A robber was ransomed

"Without purgatory penance

a felon was saved, with lying and with theft. and shrove him to Christ than S. John the Baptist or any of the Prophets many long years; rather than they to perpetual bliss.

"Then, Mary Magdalen,

"Who worse than David

"Or Paul the Apostle

"The doughtiest doctor

"Said thus in a sermon,

Lo, very idiots scize beaven, and we wise are plunged in hell.

"None sooner ravished

"Than cunning clerks

"None sooner saved,

"Than plowmen, shepherds,

"Cobblers and labourers,

" Pierce with a prayer

what woman lived worse? that Uriah destroyed, that had no pity; Augustine the old I saw it once,

from the right creed that con most books, none surer in creed, and poor common people, land-tilling folk, the palace of heaven.

"Ye men know clerks

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that curse the day

"That ever they learnt more than this,

3 believe in God the Father.

Then Scripture scorned me And blamed me—in Latin And I wept for woe and gave reasons, and set light by me, and wrath at her speech

And in a winking I was brought away.

I met then with Fortune and, with her, two damsels, Lust of the Eyes and Lust of the Flesh and Recklessness, who praised poverty to me;

" Although it be sore to suffer

" As without a walnut

" And after that,

"Is a kernel of comfort;

"It maketh man have mind on God

" And safer he sleepeth,

" And dreadeth death less,

"Than the right rich man

there cometh sweet after, is a bitter bark, the shell being gone, so is it with poverty.

and his mercy crave, the man that is poor, or the thief in the dark, —reason beareth witness—

3 am poor and play and thou art rich and art beavy.

"Lo, lo, lords, lo,

" Not so long doth it last,

" As peascods and pears,

"Worldly wealth is a wicked thing

and ladies, take heed, your liquor sweet, as cherries and plums,

to them that keep it."

He went on to speak to me of Abraham and Job—both poor men once; and told me of the merchant and the messenger. No one stayeth the messenger upon his message (even though he go through the standing corn), for it is urgent and he is but poor; but the merchant is stayed and pays money on his goods and is in fear of robbery to boot;

"Ye wit well, ye wise,

"The merchants are the rich,

what this meaneth, to Christ accountable, "They must hold the high way and the ten Commandments "And have pity and help men out of their riches, "Tithe their goods truly

and Christ is their toll-taker;" Bear ye one anothers burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ.

> beholding all about me, and the sand of the shore,

Then after Recklessness had spoken, Nature came near and complained that all animals excepting man follow Reason, and I saw it was so;

I bowed my body, Saw sun and sea, Where birds and beasts Wild serpents in the woods Flecked with many a coloured feather; Man and his mate, Poverty and plenty, And I saw all beasts In eating and drinking Man and his mate Birds I beheld I wondered from whom To lay the sticks Hiding and covering In marshes on moors

"Where gat these wild things wit?" But that which most moved me

Was that I saw all beasts Save man and mankind;

"Wherefore," said I,

Divers dived.

"Dost thou not rule

"None surfeit as he does

"In meat and in drink,

"They overdo it day and night But Reason reasoned me;

"Why I suffer or suffer not.

"Who suffereth more than God?"

with their mates wandered, and wonderful birds, Peace and War,

bliss and bitter bale; following Reason, and gendering their kind; alone were Reason-less. making nests in the bushes, and where the pie learnt that lie in her nest, that no fool should find; in mire and in water "Dear God," said I,

changing my mood, following Reason,

"so widely thou reignest man and his mate? and keep not measure, in dress and in women, and only they-none other."

"Reck thou never

"No man, by my life,

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- "He might amend in a minute all that is amiss,
- "But He suffereth to show us that we should all suffer."

Then I saw one near me called Imagination. He rebuked me for my ignorance and for my presumption in that I thought I knew how God ruled the world of man and bird and beast. Nature understandeth more than man. Man knoweth little; no, he knoweth not why Adam ate the apple, nor why the homely lark is sweeter than the rich peacock, nor whether Saracens shall come to heaven, where the pagan Trajan is. "Hadst thou held thy tongue," said he, "thou hadst been wise."

And therewith I awaked And forth gan walk And my dreams I pondered. Forune had failed me Age had threatened me

all but witless, in mendicant wise,

Friars had shown me And no corpse in their kirkyard If he had not bequeathed them And Nature had told me And Imagination had spoken and vanished.

at my most need, that all my power should vanish, they followed the rich, would they bury, to quit their debts,

his love for beasts,

And I lay down and slept again.

Then came Conscience to comfort me, And bad me come to his court There saw I a master, That louted low to Scripture, They washed and wiped But Patience in the palace stood

with Learning to dine. his name I knew not, and Conscience knew him, and went to dinner,

And prayed for meat for charity,

in pilgrims clothes,

Like to PIERS PLOWMAN.

as he a palmer were,

The master was made sit

as one that was most worthy

And Learning and Conscience Patience and I At a side-table. and Patience—came after. were put to be mates

They served us with simple food; but the master and his man on the high dais would eat nothing but the daintiest food, the sins of men.

Patience was proud And made mirth at his meat For the doctor on the dais He ate sundry meats, Wild boar and tripe, Then said I to myself, "'Tis not four days since, "This fellow preached "Why, this Gods glutton "Hath no pity on us poor; "What he preacheth he liveth not;" That the dishes and the plates And Mahomet the devil with them. But I sat still as Patience bad Rubbed his cheeks "What is Do-well, Sir Doctor,

of that proper service, but I mourned ever, drank wine so fast; minces and puddings, and eggs in grease fried, and Patience heard it, before the Dean of S. Pauls, of the penance of Paul; with his great cheeks evil he performeth,

and I wished well
were molten in his maw

and soon the doctor as ruddy as a rose; does Do-better do penance?"

"Do-well," quoth the doctor,

"Do thy neighbour no harm,

—and took the cup and drank nor thyself neither."

"By this day, Sir Doctor,

"Ye have harmed us two,

"Minces and other meat,

"I would change my penance with yours."

"Now, Learning," said Conscience, ye do not well, ye ate the pudding, no morsel had we,

"tell us what is Do-well."

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"I have seven sons," said he,

"Where liveth the lord of Life

"Till I see those seven

" For one PIERS PLOWMAN

" And set all sciences at naught

"And no text he taketh

"But these two.

Love God and thy neighbour.

Lord who shall dwell in Thy tabernacle, etc.

"And saith that Do-well and Do-better

"And they imperfects, with faith.

"And he shall save mens souls,

"serving in a castle, to teach them Do-well. have me excused, hath impugned us all, save only Love,

to maintain his cause

are two imperfect things,

find out Do-best. saith PIERS PLOWMAN."

Conscience then with Patience went.

And Patience in his pocket Sobriety and simple-speech To care for him and Conscience, Where are Unkindness and Covetise,

pilgrims as it were, took victuals pilgrim-wise, and true-belief, if they came anywhere

two hungry countries.

As we went on talking we met a minstrel and we asked him of his craft. He was, he said, a waferer and his name Active Life. "I am hater of idleness," says he, "I am no singer or fiddler, jester or dancer. From Michaelmas to Michaelmas I sell my wafers: all London knows me.

"They grumble when my cakes

"With baked bread from Stratford.

"When the commons were full of care

"In the date of our drought

"One thousand three hundred

"My cakes were scarce

come not to town,

'Tis not long since

and workmen were aghast, in a dry April, twice thirty and ten

when Chichester was mayor."

I looked at him. His coat was Christian, it is true; but full

of spots; a spot of pride, a spot of rough speech, of scorn, of careless bearing, boasting and bragging; he belonged to an order of hermits and he the only person in the order; he was religious without rule and blamed all men. "By Christ, Hankyn," said Conscience, "thy coat must be washed." "Ay," said he, "it has many stains."

And Hankyn asked and Patience told him of Poverty and of Riches, and of the nine blessings of Poverty; and Poverty avoideth the Seven Deadly Sins. "It is," said Patience, "a hateful blessing, it judges none (for it is too poor to be made a judge); it is wealth without calumny; it is the gift of God; it is mother of health; it is a road of peace; it is a well of wisdom; it is business without loss; and it is happiness without care."

When Hankyn heard this he wept and wailed and with that I waked.

DO-BETTER

But after my waking Ere I could know Do-well; And some blamed my life And set me for a lazy wretch Lords or ladies, Or persons in fine fur I never once said And never louted low Till Reason had ruth on me

it was wondrous long and all my wits waned, and few allowed it, that would not reverence or any others lives, with pendants of silver; "God save you, lords," and men held me a fool, and rocked me to sleep.

Then I met with Free Will and he told me of Charity, the beautiful story of Charity.

- "Charity," quoth I,
- "I have lived in London
- "I have lived in land,
- "Yet never found I Charity
- "Never saw I a man,
- "But would ask for his own,
- "Things that he needed not
- "Clerks tell me that Christ
- "But never saw I IIim truly
- How darkly, then face to face.
- "He is proud of a penny
- " As glad of a gown
- "As of a Tartar tunic
- "Glad with the glad,
- "Sorry when he seeth men sorry even as children are.
- "When one sweareth 'tis true
- " He weeneth no man
- " Nor any guile or grieve his fellow.
- "All sickness and sorrow
- "And all manner mischief

"Where may that be found? many long years, my name is Long Will, before or behind, so God help me, and other times covet and take them if he could.

is in all places, save in a mirror,"

as of a pound of gold, made of grey russet, or of dyed scarlet; good to all wicked,

for truth he trusteth it. would swear and lie

he taketh as solace, as ministry from heaven;

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"Of death and of dearth "Nor wept though he lost "That never paid penny	adread he was never, or lent to the man in the place when he borrowed."
"Hath he rents or riches	or any rich friends?"
"Of rents and of riches "A friend he hath that finds him "Thy will be done "He can write Paternoster	and fails him never. feeds him evermore. and paint it with Aves,
"And often his wont is "Where lie poor men and prisoners	to wend in pilgrimage, his pardon to have.
"Tho he bear them no bread" He loveth them	his help is sweeter, and looketh how they fare.
"And when he is weary "Labour in a laundry "Run back to his youth "To his pride and its purtenance "And wash it clean	then will he often for half an hour, and roundly will speak and pack it together, with his eyes warm water,
"And then singeth he at the washing En bumble and a contrite bea	and often weepeth rt Lord thou wilt not despise.
"By Christ I would I knew him	no creature sooner."
"Without help of PIERS PLOWMAN	thou seest him never."
"Do not clerks know him	that keep holy church?"
"Clerks have no knowledge "But PIERS THE PLOW- MAN God sceth their thoughts.	but by works and by words perceiveth far deeper.

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Piers Plowman

"For there be proud-hearted men

"And sweet in their bearing

"But to the poor

"And look as a lion

"And there are beggars

"Looking like lambs

"But all to have their meat

"Not for penance or perfectness

"Therefore not by colour,

"Nor by words nor by works

"But by PIERS PLOWMAN

"I have seen him in silk

"In grey and in fur

"And gladly he gave it

"Edmund and Edward

"Each was a saint

"I have seen him singing

"But in rich robes

"With cap and oiled hair

"And cleanly clothed

"In a Friars frock

"In Saint Francis time

patient of tongue, to lords and to burgesses, they have pepper in the nose, when men blame their deeds. bidders and bedesmen, and seeming life-holy, with such an easy face;

do they follow poverty. no nor by learning, shalt thou know Charity, and that is CHRIST.

I have seen him in russet, and in gilt armour, to men that it needed, each was a king, and theirs too was Charity. in ragged weeds, often he walketh and his crown shaven, in black and Tartar silk. once was he found —but it is long ago."

Then Free Will told me of the lives of the hermits, the lives of the Saints and of the bringing of heathen England to Christ; of the life of Mahomet and of the days of Constantine when lands and rents and lordships were first showered upon the church, and when from heaven came the angels voice condemning the gifts to the churches;

This gift to-day

And those that have S. Peters

power

are poisoned all.

hath poison drunk

And he went on to tell of Christs miracles and how Saracens may yet be saved.

Pharisees and Saracens, Scribes and Greeks,

Are folk of one faith God the Father they honour,

And since they know the Creeds first line,

3 believe in God the Father Almighty

Prelates of provinces should try if they would to teach them the next,

And in Jesus Christ His Son

Till they could speak and spell the third,

And in the Boly Ghost,

And say it and set it down with

the remission of sins, the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting.

Then I met with PIERS PLOWMAN and he showed me the tree of Charity and the three props of it to keep it from the World, the Flesh, and the Devil: and he went on to tell me the story of the Cross.

And I awaked therewith
And after PIERS PLOWMAN
Eastward and westward
And went forth as a fool
After PIERS PLOWMAN.

and wiped mine eyes, I looked and stared, I watched well, in the lands to espy

And anon I saw Abraham with Lazarus and he told me his story; and I met the Good Samaritan going to a tournament at Jerusalem and heard of his help to the man upon the Jericho Road when Hope and Faith fled away and would not help. And he talked with me; but at the last,

"I may no longer stay," said

he, and pricked his grey steed

And went away like the wind.

THE VISION OF THE TRIUMPH OF PIERS PLOWMAN AND OF THE HARROWING OF HELL

Woe-weary, wetshod,
Like a reckless man
Like a beggar went I,
Till I waxed weary of this
world
I rested me till Lent came,
I dreamed of maidens singing

went I forth afterwards, that recketh not of sorrow, all the days of my life,

and wished that I could sleep.
and long time I slept,
"GLORY LAUD AND
HONOUR"

And old folk sang Hosanna to the organs.

One like the Good Samaritan, and somewhat like PIERS PLOWMAN,

Came barefoot, bootless, Riding on an asses back, Like one that cometh to be

without spur or spear, brightly he looked,

Like one that cometh to be dubbèd knight,

To get him his gilt spurs and his slashed shoes.

Faith sat in a window high,

cried "Hosanna, Son of David,"

As a herald crieth when the adventurous

And Jews sang for joy.

come unto the tourney,

Blessed is be that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Then I asked Faith what might this to-do all mean, And who should fight the

in Jerusalem.

"Jesus," says he, "and he shall fetch

what the Fiend claimeth

"PIERS PLOWMANS FRUIT."

The Triumph of Piers Plowman 151 "Is Piers then in this place?" said I, and Faith stared upon me: "This Jesus of his nobility for love hath undertaken, "Not to be known as Perfect but in Piers Plowmans arms to joust, God "His helmet and his breastplate —the nature of mankind. "In Piers plate-armour this armed knight shall ride, "No dinting blow shall harm him." "And who shall joust with Tesus? Shall the scribes? the Jews?" "Nay, but the Fiend, False Judgment, Death. "Death saith he will bring down and spoil " All that liveth and lurketh, on land or sea. "Life saith he lieth, and hath laid his life on it, "That for all that Death can in three days time " Jesus from the Fiend shall fetch PIERS PLOWMANS FRUIT. "And put them where he will and bind King Luciter, "And beat and burn for everall bale and death." more

Death, 3 will be the death of thee.

Then came Pilate and much people

To see how doughtily Death should do

The Jews and justices

And all the court cried loud
on him

Then stood out a robber
"This Jesus jested at our
temple,

and sat upon the judgmentseat, and to judge betwixt them twain.

were against Jesus,

"Crucify."

before Pilate and said:

he would destroy it in a day,

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"And build it in three days again,

" Build it as long and large,

"As broad as e'er it was.

"Crucify him," cries a catchpole,

"Away, away," says another, And began to make a garland And set it sore upon his head. "Ave, Rabbi," quoth the

ribald. And nailed him with nails

And set poison on a pole

"And if thou subtle be,

"If thou be Christ,

"Come adown from this rood,

"We will believe Life loveth thee

"It is finished," quoth Christ, Piteous and pale

The Lord of life and light

The day for dread withdrew, The temple-wall wagged and clave

The hard rock was riven, The earth shook and quaked, And from their deep graves came the dead,

And told why that tempest

"Life and Death in this darkness

"And none shall know in very truth

here he stands that said it, as high and deep, We all can witness it."

"I warrant he is a witch," and took keen thorns out of a green tree,

and shot reeds in his eyes, all naked on the rood, and put it to his lips And bid him drink his death draught; "Your day is done.

help now thyself; Gods son of Heaven, we will believe thee then,

and will not let thee die."

and began to swoon, as a prisoner that dieth.

laid his eyes together.

and dark became the sun,

and all the world quivered, right dark night it seemed, as though life it had, for so long time endured.

are fighting one the other,

who shall have the mastery,

"Till Sunday about dawn."
Some said he was Gods son
Some said, "He knoweth
sorcery,

"Ere he be taken down

Two thieves suffered on the cross

Quickly came a catchpole
And their arms after
But nobody was so bold
For he was Knight and Kings
son

That none should be so hardy

But then came forth a blind knight

Longeus was his name, And before Pilate and the rest And whether he would or no All they that waited To touch him or to handle him

But this blind Bachelor The blood sprang down his spear

Then fell he on his knees
"Against my will it was," says
he,

He sighed and said:

"The deed that I have done;

"My lands, my body,

"And have mercy on me, righteous Jesu,"

Then gan Faith foully
And called them cursed caitiffs:

With that they sank to earth. that had so beautifully died;

and well is it to try if he be dead or no."

beside him at that time, and cracked their legs a-two, of either of these thieves, to touch Gods body,

-Nature would have it thus, to lay a hand upon him.

with keen-ground spear,
his sight had he long lost,
he stood and waited,
they made him strike at Jesus.
were not bold enough
or take him down and grave
him;
thrust him through the heart.

and opened the knights eyes. and cried, "Jesu, mercy,

"I wounded thee so sore."
"Sorely it troubleth me
I put me in thy hands,
take all at thy will,

and with that he wept.

the false Jews to despise, "This was vile villainy,

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- " Vengeance on you all,
- "One that is dead;
- "Cursed caitiffs,
- "With any bright weapon
- "Yet for all his grievous wounds
- "For your champion chevalier,
- "Yields himself vanquished in the tilt,
- "And when this darkness is past by
- "And ye lordings have lost the day
- "Your freedom shall be thraldom;
- "Them shall ye never
- "But ye shall be barren men,
- "The life which our Lord God
- "Now are your good days done,
- "When Christ overcame

cease.

All for fear of this I moved me in that darkness

Then saw I walking from the west

Mercy her name, mild and kind, Her sister comely and clean Truth was her name and strong And when these maidens met, Each asked the other Of the darkness and the din And of the light and gleam

that made blind man beat 'tis a boys deed. it was never knighthood, to strike a body bound;

hath Jesus won the prize, chief knight of you all,

and is at Jesus will.

Death will be vanquished,

for Life shall have the mastery,

your children shall be churls, make lords of land to till it. ye shall live by usury, in all your laws forbade.

as David told of you, your kingdom should depart." When the Holy of Holics cometh your anointing shall

> and of the false Jews towards Hell where He had gone.

a maiden looking hell-ward, a maiden lovely in speech, softly walking from the east, is the power that went with her. Mercy and Truth, of the great wonder, and of the dawning light, which lay before Hell gate.

- "I marvel at this," said Truth,
- "Marvel not," saith Mercy,
- "A maid named Mary,
- "Conceived and was with
- "And without childbirth taint
- " And since this child was born
- "He died and suffered
- "That is the cause of this eclipse
- " Meaning that man shall be
- "While this light and gleam thou seest
- " Patriarchs and prophets
- "The thing that through a tree was lost
- " And that which death brought down to hell
- "That thou tellest," says
 Truth,
- " For Adam, Eve and Abraham,
- " All that lie in pain,
- "Or have them out of hell?
- "It is but trifling talk;
- "The thing that once was in hell
- "Job, the perfect patriarch, In bell is no redemption.

- "and go to know its meaning."
 "it meaneth mirth.
 mother immaculate,
- through the Holy Ghost, into this world brought him, have thirty winters gone; this day about noon;

that closeth now the sunlight, drawn from the murk of hell

shall blind Lucifer."

have preached it oft,

shall by a tree be won,

death shall relieve."

"is but a tale of Walterot;
patriarchs and prophets,
shall yon light bring them
aloft
Hold thy tongue, Mercy,

I, Truth, know it,

out of it cometh never, reproveth thy saying:

- "Through what I have learnt," says Mercy, "I hope they shall be saved;
- " Venom cureth venom,
- " And Adam and Eve
- "Of all biting venoms

for that I have proof, shall have remedy.

the vilest is the scorpions;

- "No medicine may amend
- "Till he be dead and put upon the spot; and then he destroyeth
- "The first poison,
- "So shall this Death destroy,
- " All that Death did first
- " And even as thro' guile
- "So shall Grace that began all things
- " And beguile Guile Art sball deceive art.
- "Stay," said Truth,
- "From out the nipping north,
- "Righteousness running;
- "He knoweth more than we,
- "That is Truth," quoth Mercy,
- " Peace comes playing
- "Love hath long coveted her;
- "He hath sent her some letter
- "That thus hangeth over Hell,

When Peace in patience clad Righteousness saluted her And prayed Peace tell In her gay garments

- "My will is to wend," says she,
- " Adam and Eve
- " Moses and many more
- "And I shall dance and thou,
- "For Jesus jousted well

At morning time there shall be joy.

- "Love, my dear one,
- " That my sister Mercy and I
- " And that God hath forgiven

the place where he stingeth, through power of himself, I dare lay my life, thro' the devils enticements; man was beguiled,

make a good end, and that is good cunning."

- "I see, methinketh, not far from hence, rest we a while, of old he was before us."
- "and I see from the south and in patience clothed. nay, I believe, to say what this light meaneth, and she shall tell us all."

approached the two, in her rich clothing, to what place she wended and whom she thought to greet.

"and welcome them all, and many more in hell, shall sing the Song of Mary, sister, shalt dance to it, and joy beginneth to dawn.

such letters sent me, mankind should save, and granted to all mankind,

- "That Mercy and I
- "Christ hath changed
- "To fear and pity,

shall go bail for all. the nature of righteousness of his pure grace."

"Lo here the patent and the token

In peace I shall sleep and take rest. "Ravest thou," saith Right-

- "Ravest thou," saith Righteousness,
- "Believest thou you light
- "And save mans soul?
- "At the beginning
- "Adam and Eve,
- "Should die downright
- "If they touched the tree
- "And Adam afterwards,
- " Ate of the fruit
- "The loyal love of our Lord
- "And followed the teaching of the Fiend
- "Against reason I, Righteousness,
- "Their pain is perpetual,
- "Let them chew as they chose
- "It is a bootless bale,
- "And I shall pray," says
 Peace,
- "Their woe change into weal.
- "Had they known no woe
- "No wight knoweth weal
- "No man knoweth hunger
- "Who could by nature
- "If all the world were swanwhite;
- "Who could tell clearly
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that the deed shall endure."

"or art thou right drunk? may unlock hell, Sister, believe it never.

God gave the doom himself and their issue all, and dwell in pain eternal, and of its fruit did eat, against the warning, and, as it were, forsook and his teaching,

and the will of his flesh.

remember this in truth; no prayers may them help, and let us not chide, the bit which they once ate."

"their pain may have an end

they had not known their weal, that never suffered woe; that never felt want; tell me what colour is,

and if no night were what means the day?

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- "Had God never suffered
- "Never had He clearly known

at other hands than his if death were sour or sweet.

"So God that made all

"And suffered himself

"Death that unknitteth every

"For till famine come on us

"Therefore God of his goodness

"In solace and in sovran mirth,

"And then suffered him to sin, to feel sorrow,

"To know what weal was.

"And afterwards adventured.

"To know what Adam suffered

"In heaven, in earth,

"To know what all woe is

"So shall it fare with this folk:

"Shall teach them what love is

"For no wight knoweth what war is

"Nor what is 'well'

There was one there Father Book was his name

"By Gods body," says this Book

"When this child was born

"That all the wise of this world

"That in Bethlehem city

"To save mans soul

"And all the elements

"The welkin first showed

"Those that were in heaven

" And lighted it as a torch

"That light followed the Lord

became man of a maiden, to see death-sorrow;

and is the beginning of rest; none knoweth what is enough. set the first man Adam

and took Adams nature in three sundry places, and now he goeth into hell, -God that knew all joy.

their folly and their sin and endless joy;

when peace reigneth, till 'well-a-day' teach him."

with two broad eyes, a bold man of speech;

"I will bear witness there blazed a star,

in one word agreed a child was born and sin destroy. bare witness unto that. that he was God Almighty, took a star-comet, to reverence his birth, to the earth below.

"The water witnessed he was God,

" Peter the apostle

"And as he went upon the water

for he walked on it. perceived his going,

knew him well and said,

Lord, bid me come to Thee upon the waters.

"Lo, how the sun gan lock

"When she saw him suffer death

"Lo, the earth for sorrow

"Quaked like a quick thing

"Hell could not hold,

"And let out Simeons sons

her light up in herself

who made the sun and sea.
that he should suffer death
and cracked the rocks in pieces.
it opened when God suffered,
to see him hang upon the
Rood.

The shall not see death . . .

"Now shall Lucifer believe it

"For Jesus, like a giant,

"To beat and break down

" And to have out all he will.

"I, Father Book, will be burnt,

" And comfort all his kinsmen

"And disjoin and destroy

"And save they reverence his resurrection

" And on a new law believe

"Stay we," said Truth,

"Speaking to hell."

Lift up your gates.

And in the Light a voice

"Ye Princes of this palace,

" Here cometh unto his crown

tho loth he be, cometh yonder with an engine

if Jesus rise not unto life, and bring them out of care, the joy of all the Jews,

all that be against him

and honour the Rood they shall be lost life and soul." "I hear and see a spirit

cried loud to Lucifer; unpin, unlock the gates; the King of all glory."

Then sighed Satan and said:

"Such a light against our will

Lazarus once fetched,

- "Cold care and trouble
- " If this king come in to us
- "And lead them all where Lazarus is
- " Patriarchs and prophets
- "That such a lord and such a light
- "Rise up, Ragamuffin,
- "That Belial thy grandfather
- " And I shall stay this lord
- " Ere through brightness we be blinded,
- " Check him and chain all up,
- "That no light may leap in,
- "Ashtaroth, cry thou loud,
- "Colting and all his kin,
- "Cast upon their heads
- "Brimstone burning, boiling.
- "Set bows with levers,
- "Shoot out shot enough
- " Set Mahomet at the catapults
- "With crooks and calthrops
- "Listen," quoth Lucifer,
- "Both this lord and this light
- "No death can harm him,
- "And where he will he takes his way
- "If he rob me of my right
- "For by right and reason
- "Be mine body and soul
- " For he himself hath said,
- "Adam and Eve and all their sons
- "If that they touched the tree
- "Thus this Lord of Light allowed.

is come upon us all. mankind he will fetch too

and lightly will he bind me. have spoken of this thing

shall lead them all hence.

and bring us all the bars and thy dam hammered out, and stop his light,

bar we our gates. and each chink stop, at loover or at loophole; and have out all our knaves, and save all we own; who come anigh the walls

and brazen guns, their squadrons to blind; and hurl millstones on them, harass them all."

"I know this lord well, long time I have known them, nor no devils craft,

but beware him of the peril. he robbeth me by strength, the men that be in hell good and evil; who is the father of hell, should die and dwell with us for ever,

or took an apple of the fruit,

"And, since he be so true a lord,

"We have been possessed of them

"Never was word against it

"He were a traitor to his word

"That is true," saith Satan,

"For we gat these men with guile,

"Against his love, against his leave

"Not in fiendly fashion

"And sat up in the apple-tree,

"And we promised her and him

" As the gods do, as God himself.

With and with treason treachery

" And made them break obedience

"Thus gat we them as ours

"Yet where guile is at the root

"And God will not be guiled,"

"We have no true title to them;

"Therefore I dread me,

"As thou didst cheat Gods image

"So hath he cheated us

"Thirty winters hath he come in a mans likeness,

I ween he will not rob us;

seven thousand winters;

and if he now began

-and he, the Witness of Truth."

"but I sore doubt me

and we his garden entered

and went upon his land, but in a serpents form, and egged Eve to eat.

that after they should know

both good and ill,

we deceived them both,

through our false behest; and brought them hither at the last;

what is gotten is ill gotten."

says Goblin, "nor be tricked; though our treasures they were judged,

lest Truth will fetch them.

in going like a snake, in coming like a Man.

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" And about gone and preached,"

"I have assailed him with sin;

"Short answer made he me.

"And when I saw that it was

"What kind of man he was

"I would have lengthened his life;

" And his soul came hitherward

"This body, while it went alive,

"To teach men to be true

"The which life and custom

"He will undo us devils

"And now I see his soul,

"With glory and great light;

"I counsel that we flee,

"It were better not to be

"Through thy lies, O Lucifer,

"And out of heaven hither

"We believed in thy lies,

"And now, for thy last lying,

"We have lost our lordship

(The writer speaks)

As Satan rebuked Lucifer I believe our Lord And requite them the wretched-

Be ye ware, ye wise clerks, Ye deceive not the simple;

A little have I overleapt, And have not said what I saw

What is the liars end; Thou shalt destroy all that speak lying.

says the fiend Goblin. I have asked if he be God,

I warned Pilates wife, for the Jews hated him.

I knew that if he died he would despoil us all. ever it went about and each to love the other, he usèd long. and bring us all down.

sailing hitherwards, 'tis God, I know well; flee fast all of us, than abide in his sight. we first lost our joy, thy pride made us to fall; and thus we lost our bliss, we have lost Adam, on water and in hell." How shall the prince of this world be east forth.

> then for his lying will rebuke liars here,

that on earth is wrought. ye witty men of law, David witnesseth

because of lying, and followed my story.

The Triumph of Piers Plowman

(The narrative proceeds)

When Light bad unlock the gates,

"What lord art thou?" says Lucifer.

"The Lord of Might and Main,

"Thou duke of this dim place,

"That Christ may enter in

And a voice said aloud, that made all things, anon undo thy gates, the Kings Son of heaven."

With that word hell brake
For aught that any wight could
do,

Wide the gates opened. The people that sat in darkness Echold, the Lamb of God.

Lucifer could not look up,
And those whom our Lord had
loved

"Lo, I am here," saith He,

" For all sinful souls,

"Mine were they; of me they came;

"Although reason may remember,

"That, if they ate the apple,

"I declared for them no hell for ever.

"The deadly sin they did

"With guile thou gainedst them,

"For in my palace Paradise,

"Falsely thou fetchedst thence

"Thou like a lizard with a ladys face

"Trappedst them, beguiledst them,

"Against my love, against my leave;

"The old law teacheth

beguilers are beguiled,

and all Belials bars,

or porter of the gate. Patriarchs and prophets sang with S. John

the light so blinded him,

with that light departed forth; "life and soul both to save the rights of them and me;

I may the better claim them;

and my own right too, all should die,

by thy deceit was done;

against all reason, in form of an adder, things that I loved.

breaking my garden through,

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- "And in their cunning fall;
- "And whose hitteth out mans eye

Ege for ege, tooth for tooth.

the same pain shall he have.

- "So life shall be lost
- "Life for a life,
- "Soul for a soul,
- "Adam and his issue

when life hath taken life. the old Law asketh so, and by that Law I claim it, at my will for evermore.

- "I, that am lord of life,
- "And, for that drink to-day, I died.
- "I will drink of no ditch,
- "But from the Common Cups
- "But thy drink is death,
- " I fought so for mans sake 3 thirst.
- "No nectar and no cyder
- "Shall moisten me,
- "Until the vintage fall
- "And I drink ripe wine,
- "Then shall I as king
- " And have out of Hell
- "Fiends and fiendlings " And at my bidding be
- "But I am merciful to men,
- "For men and I be blood brethren,
- "All that be wholly brothers of mine
- "Shall not be damned

love is my drink,

that yet,

of no deep knowledge, -all Christian soulsand deep hell thy bowl.

and no costly drink or slake my thirst, in the valley of Josaphat, the resurrection of the dead. come with angels and with crowns,

all mens souls.

before me shall stand, for bliss or pain. my nature asketh it, though not all brothers in baptism;

in baptism and blood to the death everlasting. Against thee only bave 3 sinned.

- "It is not mens wont
- to hang a felon more than once;
- " And if the king of the kingdom come
- "When a thief should suffer death or punishment

The Triumph of Piers Plowman

"Law willeth that the king if the felon look on him. give life "I that am king of kings shall come at such a time "Where the death-doom condemneth all the wicked, "And if Law will I look on them it lieth in my grace, "Whether they die or do not die did they never so ill; " And if their sins be bold I may do mercy, "Though Holy Writ will I be on them that did ill. avenged Ho evil deed unpunished, etcetera. "They shall be cleansed clearly and washed from all their sins, "In my prison purgatory till pardon suffer it. "For blood may see blood a-hungered and a-cold, "But blood may not see blood bleed without ruth and pity. "But my righteousness and my right shall reign in Hell, " And mercy and mankind shall stand before me heaven; "I were an unkind king if I helped not my kin "At such a time of need. Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, O Lord. "Thus, by right of Law, I lead away hence " All that loved me and believed in my coming;

"But, for the lie, Lucifer, "Thou shalt abide it bitterly" (quoth God), and bound him with chains. Astrot and all others They durst not look upon our Lord But let him lead forth what he list

The flesh sinneth, the flesh redeemeth, the flesh reigneth, God of God.

Then piped Peace "After sharpest showers,

And many hundred angels

that thou didst lie to Eve,

hid themselves in darkness,

the least of them all,

and leave there whom he would, harped and sang;

a note of poetry and sang; most shining is the sun;

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Piers Plowman

"There is no warmer weather

"Nor is love sweeter,

"Than after war and wrack

"War never was in this world,

"Which Love if he would

"And Peace through patience

"A truce," quoth Truth,

A truce, quoti Truth,

"And let no people," quoth

Peace,

"For nothing is impossible

than after watery clouds, nor are friends dearer,

when Love and Peace have gotten the victory.

nor wicked envy,

could not to laughter bring,

all perils end."

"thou tellest truth,

"Embrace we in covenant of it; each of us kiss the other;"

"see that we chide to him that is almighty."

"Thou sayest sooth," says Righteousness, and kissed Peace reverently

And Peace kissed her world without end.

Mercy and truth bave met together; righteousness and peace bave kissed each other.

Truth then trumpeted and sang;

We praise Thee, O God.

And Love luted in a loud note;

See bow good and joyful a thing it is . . .

Till the day dawned these damsels danced,

And men rang in the resurrection morning.

And to Kalot my daughter and said:

With that I woke

....

"Arise, do reverence

"Creep on your knees to the cross

"And the most righteous relic,

" For for our redemption

"And so great is its power

"That where its shadow falls

and called to Kitty my wife

to Gods resurrection,

and kiss it for a jewel, none richer on the earth, it bare Gods blessed body,

it frighteneth every fiend, no grisly ghost may glide."

falls no grisly ghost may glide."

(An abstract of the concluding books follows.)

DO-BEST

Thus I waked and wrote And dight me ready To hear the mass In midst of the mass I fell soon asleep That PIERS THE PLOW-

MAN

And came in with a cross Like in all his limbs And then I called Conscience " Is this Jesus the Jouster "Or is it PIERS PLOWMAN; And Conscience kneeled, "His colours, his coat-armour, "It is Christ with his Cross

all I had dreamed, and went me to church. and be housled after. when men went to offering, and suddenly—a dream,

was painted all bloody before the common people, to our Lord Jesu, to tell me the truth: that the Jews did to death, who painted him so red?" "These be Piers arms, but He that cometh so bloody conqueror of Christendom."

Then Conscience told me of Christs resurrection and how He gave his power to PIERS PLOWMAN, and anon departed into heaven and sent the Holy Ghost to Piers and to his fellows and gave them many gifts, the four gospels and the four fathers, Austin, Ambrose, Gregory and Jerome, and four seeds; and Piers sowed them all, cardinal virtues, Prudence and Temperance and Justice and Bravery.

Then came Pride and gathered his host together against Piers and against Grace and against Conscience and all Christians, and sent out Spill-love mounted on his horse Speak-illbehind. And Piers and his people gathered to Fort Unity and dug a trench about it, and Conscience called Piers army to the sacrament.

"Christians and dine all this Lent time and Gods body there-under."

[&]quot;Come," cries Conscience, "Ye that laboured lovally

[&]quot;Here is bread blessèd

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"How," quoth the common men,

" All that we owe

"That is my counsel, "Then be forgiven,

"Yea, baw," cries a brewer,

"By fear, for all your jangling

"Nor follow Conscience

" Dregs and draff

"Thick ale and thin ale,

"Not to toil after holiness."

"I am a curate of the church," cries a fool vicar,

"Never man told me

"I never knew Cardinal

"And the robbers that ride with them.

" and must we needs pay ere we go to housling?"

each forgive other, and then-the altar."

"I will not be ruled with your spirit of justice, while I can sell and draw it at one tap that is my trade

of cardinal virtues, that came not from the Pope, "And we parsons pay for them, their furs and their palfreys,

"Therefore," says this vicar, "No Cardinal should come

"Let them and their holiness

"With the Jews at Avignon."

with the boly thou shalt be boly.

"Or in Rome as their rule bids

"And thou Conscience, thy place

" And Grace that thou pratest of

"And Piers with his new plough

"Should be Emperor of all the world

"Imperfect is the Pope

" by very God, I would among the common people, hold them still

to keep relics there.

is in the Kings courts

should guide all clerks

and eke with his old

and make it all Christian, that should all people help,

The Vision of Do-Best

"And sendeth men to slay

"And God bless Piers Plowman

" As well for wastrels

" As for his servants and himself

" And travaileth and tilleth

" As for a true tidy man

" As for the commons

"The counsel of Conscience

Then out laughed a lord,

"I hold it right and reason

"All that my auditors

"Counsel me by their books

"With the spirit of understanding

"With the spirit of bravery

Then there came a king

"I am king

"And holy church and learning

" And if me lacketh aught

"Where soonest I find it.

"And what I take of you

"Of the spirit of justice,

"I may be safely housled

"In condition," quoth Conscience

science
"And rule thy realm in reason

"Then shalt thou have thine asking."

Ell is thine to defend, but not thine to rob.

The vicars home was far off and he bowed

And I awaked

and he bowed and took leave and wrote my dream.

"that thou canst defend

right well and in truth

Then for the last time I went upon my way and I met Need. He reviled me for meekly listening when the lord and the king

those he should save,

who tilleth for all, and wenches in the brothel

though he serves himself first, as hard for a traitor all times alike. they heed but little and his cardinal virtues."

"By this light," says he, to take of my steward or else my agents and by my clerks accounts

they made the account roll, willy nilly I take it."

and, "By my crown," he said, the commons to rule, from the cursed to defend, Law wills that I take it I am above the Law. I take it at the teaching for I judge you all, for I never borrow."

had spoken so boldly. "Couldst thou not excuse thyself?" says he. "The king steals, the lord steals; and thy need, thy necessity may well steal too. Need hath no Law."

He sinneth not And if he seeth a cloth Need anon taketh it And if he list to drink He should drink at any ditch So Need at greed need Without counsel of Conscience Save the spirit of temperance. Wise men forsook wealth And dwelt in deserts And God all his great joy And came and took mankind in him Both fox and fowl Fishes have fins Need hath taken hold on me And suffer sorrows sour. Be not abashed Since He that wrought all the world Never a one so needy

that winneth his food thus, and can make no better bargain and keepeth it for surety. the law of nature would ere he for thirst died; may take as for his own or any cardinal virtues

for they would be needy, and would not be rich, spiritually left

and became needy; may flee to holes and creep, to fleet therewith to rest, and I must needs stay

to beg and to be needy,

was willingly needy, nor none died so poor.

THE VISION OF ANTICHRIST

When Need left me
And dreamed marvellously
Antichrist came,
Turned upside down
And made the false spring and
spread
In every country where he
came
And made guile grow there

anon I fell asleep that in mans form and all the crop of truth and overset the root

increasing mens needs.

he cut truth away, as though he were God. Friars followed that fiend
Convents reverenced him
And all the house came forth
To welcome his, to welcome him,

And they would rather die than live

Antichrist had thus soon Pride bare it boldly

"I counsel you," says Concience,

"Into the Fort of Unity

"Cry we to Nature

" From the hurts of the fiend

"Cry we to all the commons

"And there abide and fight

Nature heard Conscience
And sent forth his foragers,
Coughs and heart-catches
Rheums and red eyes
Boils and botches
Frenzies and foul ills
Pricked and preyed
That a legion lost their lives.
"Harrow and help," they cried,
"With dreadful Death
The lecherous lord
To a knight called Comfort
"To arms," cried Comfort,
Then met the battle
Or heralds of arms

Old Age hoary
Bare the banner before Death,

for he gave them copes, and rang their bells, to welcome the tyrant

save fools alone,

since loyalty was blamed.

hundreds at his banner, and a lecherous lord.

"come with me, ye fools, and hold we us there, to come and defend us for love of PIERS PLOW-MAN.

to come into Unity gainst Belials children."

and from the planets came, fevers and fluxes, cramps and toothaches, and running scabs, and burning ague, the foragers of Nature, on peoples heads

"here cometh Nature to undo us all." then cried aloud to bear his banner. "each keep his own life." ere minstrels could pipe had named the knights.

went in the vanward, by right he claimed it; Nature came after
Pocks and pestilence,
Death drove down after him
Kings and Knights,
Learned and foolish,
Whom he hit straight
Many a lovely lady,
Swooned and died

Conscience of his courtesy
To cease and suffer them
Leave Pride privily
And Nature ceased

Fortune gan flatter
Long life he promised them
Among all manner men
And gathered a great host
Lechery did his will
With privy speech
Armed him in idleness
A bow he bare in hand
Feathered with fair promise
And his untidy tales
Conscience and his company

Then came Covetise
Overcome Conscience
Armed him in avarice
His weapons all wiles
And with glosing and with
gabbing
Simony sent him
To hold with Antichrist
And bid them come
Made Good Faith flee
And boldly brought down

with many keen sores, and slew much people; and pashed all to dust, Kaisers and Popes, let no man stand, never stirred after; many a knights leman for sorrow of Deaths dints.

Nature besought and see if they would and be perfect Christian; to see the people mend.

the few that lived, and sent out Lechery unwedded and wedded, all against Conscience. with a laughing face, and painted word, and in high looks, and many broad arrows, and many a false truth, troubled full oft of holy church the teachers.

casting how he might and the cardinal virtues, and lived hungerly, to win and to hide,

he guiled the people. to preach to the prelates and save their stipends to Court to Conscience and Falsehood stay, with many a bright bribe The wit and wisdom
Rode at a judge
And overset his truth
Then to the Court of Arches
And with a miniver mantle
Matrimony went his way
And devised divorce.

"A," cried Conscience,

"So keen a fighter

Then laughed Life And armed him in haste Held Holiness for a jest

And Loyalty a churl Conscience and Counsel

Thus Life boasted
And pricked forth with Pride
Cared not how many Nature
slew
And kill all earthly creatures

Life leapt aside
"Health and I," cried he,
"Shall keep thee from dread
"We will forget sorrow

This pleased Life
And they gloried and begat
One that wrought much woe,
And Sloth waxed wondrously
And wedded Wanhope
Her sire was a juryman
One Tommy Two-tongues

of Westminster Hall; and tilted at his ear with "Take-this-and-help-us;" and turned Law to Simony, bribed its officers, ere death departed them

"would Covetise were Christian, so bold and biding."

and slashed his clothes, in ribald words, and Kindness for a spend-thrift, and Liar a gentleman, he counted it folly.

when things seemed better, and praised no virtue,

who at the last shall come save Conscience alone.

and caught a leman to him, "and an high heart of Death or Eld, and care naught for sin."

and Fortune his leman, a gaddling at last,
—Sloth was his name—
and soon was of age,
a wench from a brothel;
that never swore true,
tainted in every court,

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Then Sloth spied war And threw dread of despair And Conscience cried on Eld Bad him fight for the right

Then Eld took heart
And waved away Wanhope
And Life fled away
Besought him succour
Gave gold, good measure
The doctors gave him
Life believed that leechcraft
And with drinks and drugs

Sloth with his sling
Proud priests came with him
With cloaks and pointed shoes
They came on Conscience,
"By Mary," quoth a cursed
priest

"I count Conscience not a whit
"No not so much as

So said sixty
And shot their shots against us,
Broad-hooked arrows

And almost brought down Holiness and Unity.

Then came the Friars to help Conscience; but they knew not how to fight. Yet Need pleaded for them and at last Conscience smiled and took them in to the Castle of Unity.

"Keep you in Unity, "Learned or simple

"I will be your surety

"If ye leave Logic

and made a sling ready twelve mile around him,

and frighten Despair.

and was hastily shriven and fought with Life, to Physic for help, and used his salves, that gladdened his heart a glass house to live in. should stay the steps of Eld drive away Death.

an hard assault he made, more than a thousand, and long blades dangling; they fought for Covetise,

(was of the Irish border), if so be I get silver, a draught of good ale."

of the same country,

nails,"

many a sheaf of oaths, "By-Gods-heart, by-Gods-

and envy none,
but live by your rule
for your bread and for your
clothes
and learn instead to Love."

Conscience held him
And made Peace porter
All tale tellers
Hypocrisy and envy
Conscience called a leech
Salve those that sick be
Shrift shaped sharp salve
"Pay that thou owest."

in holy church Unity, to pin the gates; and idle titterers, an hard assault made; that well could shrive, and by sin wounded; and made men do penance,

Some liked not this leech
"Was any surgeon in the fort
Love-to-live-in-Lechery
He had fasted on a Friday
"One Friar Flattery," says he,

and sent up letters with softer plasters?" lay there and groaned, and fared as he would die, "is surgeon and physician."

"We have no need," says Conscience,

"Parson or parish priest,

"Than one PIERS PLOW-MAN

"Yet will I suffer

" Friar Flattery be fetched

"I wot no better leech penitencer or bishop,

that ruleth them all. since ye desire it to physic all you sick."

Friar Flattery heard of it,
To a lord for a letter
As though he were curate,
Boldly to the bishop
Came there where Conscience
was
Peace unpinned it,

hied him fast to have leave to cure and came with his letters and gat his brief;

and knocked at the gate, porter of Fort Unity, what was his wish.

"Ifaith," quoth this Friar, "For his profit and health,

And in haste asked him

"I would talk with Contrition for this I came hither."

"He is sick," quoth Peace,
Hypocrisy hath hurt them,

"and many another, hardly will they recover."

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Piers Plowman

"But I am surgeon,

"I pray thee then," saith, Peace,

"Who art thou then?

"Certes," says he,

"Yea, go thy gate," says Peace,

"I knew one like thee

"Came in a cope

"Was my lords leech

"This preacher salved the women,

"Till some were with child."

Conscience knoweth me."

"ere thou pass in, Hide not thy name."

"I am, Sir Enter-houses."

"thou comest not herein, eight winter gone, at a court where I dwelt, and leech to my lady,

when the lord was away,

But Kind-speech bid Peace

"Let in the Friar;

"Life by his teaching

" And dread Death

"And be at one with Conscience."

open the gates, he may here see leave all Covetise

and withdraw from Pride

"Thou art welcome," quoth Conscience,

" Here is Contrition

"Comfort him

"The parsons plaster

"He left it on him overlong,

"canst heal the sick? my cousin, wounded, and care for his sores biteth him deep, from one Lent to another."

"I shall amend it," said the Preacher,
And goes and grips Contrition and g
Made of a private payment; and te
"I shall pray for you and fo
To another, "I shall make you Sister
"At mass and matting my

"At mass and mattins, my lady,

Thus he goeth and gathered and gold,

and gave him a plaster and to one he says, and for all your friends," Sister of an Order,

for a little silver."

and flattereth when he shriveth,

Till Contrition clean forgot And lie awake for his wicked deeds And Contrition left contrition And took his comfort from the Friar.

to cry and weep, as once he was wont, that is the sovran salve.

Conscience cried aloud And called upon Contrition Saith Peace, "He lieth and dreameth "The Friar with his physic "And plastered them so pleasantly

and bad Learning help him to help and keep the gate;

and so doth many another, this folk hath enchanted.

they dread no sin."

"By Christ," quoth Conscience, "I will become a pilgrim " And walk as wide

as the world lasteth

"To seek-PIERS PLOWMAN."

(Here endeth PIERS PLOWMAN.)



COMMENT

Comfort the poor, protect and shelter the weak, and with all thy might right that which is wrong. Then shall the Lord love thee and God Himself shall be thy great reward.—Attributed to King Alfred.

EVERY literature has its dreamers. It is so simple to sit down, fall asleep, and then assail your enemies and support yourself by dreaming your opinions. If any objection be taken, well, it was a dream. Plato dreamed his beautiful myths; the wonderful relation of Er at the close of the Republic was but the dream of one who had been dead; the moody tinker of Bedford dreamed the Pilgrims Progress; Roman literature has its Somnium Scipionis; Chaucer dreamed Scipios dream again in the Parlement of Foules; Dantes vision was but a vision when sleep came on him in the wood; the whole of the Faerie Queene may be said to be a dream. The dream is as common to poet and prose writer as is the invisible cap or the impossible task to the folk and fairy lorist.

It must be admitted at the outset that some dreams—whatever the machinery may be for their production—are artistic, finished, jointed, logical. We recall them in the morning; beyond their incongruity, their horror or their fun, we can find no fault with them. Indeed we are amazed at their cleverness. All is in order; every incident proceeds from what has gone before; they are admirably prepared; and good dreamers will certainly support and believe R. L. Stevensons statement that the dreaming brain can make excellent plots. The well-known essay on Dreams gives, apparently in good faith, an illustration of this, and Stevensons dream-plot, if unmarketable, is, at least, most striking.

But other dreams, literary or no, are as confused as the welter of waves on a rocky shore. You make out the general movement, but no more. New waves are continually breaking from all sides; and it is to this order of dream that the vision of Piers Plowman belongs. As I said in the Preface, the general scheme is clear; but the detailed pictures are inconsistent, detached, and in some instances apparently useless for the main purpose.

The writer is always falling asleep; half-way through the book he is dead and buried; the vision finishes and begins again; the end is no end; the Plowman himself is an elusive dream-figure with many shades of meaning in him; apparently, though it was twice revised, the work had no final revision. It is of a piece with its chaotic century. We should not be surprised to find that the book was based on a dream.

But the confusion of the dream is nothing to the confusion of the allegory. Even the sexes of the various figures seem indeterminate; and Wit, Wisdom, Clergy, Scripture, Imagination, the Active Man, Peace, Mercy, Reason, Righteousness, Repentance, must not be driven hard towards consistency. It will be well for the reader, if he wishes to get a clear picture of the dream, not to insist upon its details. That such a clear picture may be obtained I hope I have shown in my Preface; but few allegories may be pushed roughly to their conclusions. Even Professor Saintsbury, that eulogist of the Facrie Queene, is constrained to admit that you may if you like leave the allegory alone; it "won't hurt you."

The book definitely promises a picture of England between 1350 and 1400. The dates of course are not given, but these are supplied by the evidence of its contents. We are to see the Field full of Folk. We are not going to look on any Dutch interiors, or mere portraiture of a few saints and a few sinners; there are to be no "nine and twenty in a company of sundry folk by aventure ifalle;" something wider, bigger is promised us, nothing short of a birds-eye view of the English world with London for its centre, while the dreamers body lies on the Malvern Hills, and over him sing the birds of early summer, and the brook runs babbling by and mingles its sound with the noise of a great multitude. You shall see the Pope, titular head of Christendom, finding it hard as the King does to guide men as he would; cardinals against whose election you and I may not speak, for we are no Lollards, not we; bishops running freely through all sorts of offices and doing all kinds of work as William of Wykeham and Bishop Spencer of Norwich did; unable, for all their cleverness, to rule their dioceses and to keep the robber pardoner and the meddling friar away; priests, deacons and subdeacons, acolytes, exorcists, readers and doorkeepers, all the seven "minor orders" of the Church; you shall see abbots, men of business, Priors, men of management, and all the people under their rule; monks and professed brethren, clerks and

novices; you shall see the hard-working parish priest, passably ignorant, miserably poor and made poorer by his mortal enemy the friar; the friars, all the four orders, Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites and Austins, pledged to poverty and pursuing wealth; the chantry priest and the gild priest each bent on making an income and filling a soft place; and with them the good and bad accompaniments of a great Church, hermits, anchorites, pilgrims and palmers. But there are more to be seen than these; and in the great plain are officials of every kind, sheriffs and bedcls, assizers and jurymen, whose business it seems to be to prev upon humanity. Turn your eyes in another direction and Edward III. is slowly dying (alas for the Black Prince who might have done so much—he is gone) and Lady Meed is stripping off his ring; the kitten Richard II., so helpless at first, so foolish afterwards, is in the hands of Parliament or nobles; the nobles are quarrelling, the Commons are curbing them; disorder, disorganisation and attempted reform can all be seen from Malvern Hills. As for the lawyers, you shall see enough of them, all dressed in furs, all pleading for pence, all open to bribery, and juries and witnesses, judges and pleaders are on the look-out for florins. Then the merchants pass by and the moneylenders, the big and little traders, till we come to the very dregs and find ourselves face to face with the Seven Deadly Sins of London. London itself and its narrow ways, its bridges, its palaces, its convents, its hovels, its brothels, you shall see them all and almost catch the conversations as the people pass by us. You can be present at the great Stourbridge fair and there see Venetian glass, Bruges linen, Spanish iron, Norwegian tar, Hanse fur, Cornish tin and Cretan wine, all for sale in the half of a square mile which was occupied for three whole weeks. Then you shall come forth into the country and watch the misery of the country poor, hear of their work, their food, their dress; and so along the roads past the crowds of beggars and wastrels, till perhaps you shall get a dinner in some great mans house and take part, from a side-bench, in a discussion of some useless point of theology. Nothing shall escape you by the way, the burial-places of the Great Pestilence, the stocks, the pillory, the cucking-stool, the alchouse, the hospital, the prison, the recluse in his cell, the doctor murdering his patients, the minstrel telling his love stories, the juggler and the monkey-man, the farmer and his stots, the poor priest preaching, the lunatic loller prophesying, and the train of Lady Meed. Nay, you may, if

you be fortunate, see Piers himself, sowing his seed and preaching to the pilgrims of Truth, and may dream of him, as Jesus, leaving the world with Piers Plowmans fruit—poor humanity—in his arms, the only Saviour of the world. This world-wide "landscape with figures" is the promise of William Langland—a promise more than fulfilled, for not half the scenes have been enumerated, not a quarter of the characters named. Could any one to-day, in Langlands social position, dream, promise

and perform so great an undertaking as this?

We take the story from the writers standpoint. It is not, as some histories tell us, that the kings wars were unimportant; but they were to the writer and to the people whom he represents the least important of his visions. No one in editing a peoples book to-day should begin with discussing the European position, or the change of an Indian capital; but the price of sugar, the picture palace, the emptiness of churches, the sixpenny doctor, the schools, the football field, the public-house and the district nurse would attract the Langland of to-day By the Langland of to-day I mean Mr. Masterman, Miss Loane, Mr. Lyons, Mr. Pett Ridge, Mr. H. G. Wells, Mr. Harold Begbie and Mr. Stephen Reynolds. I begin then with the book picture of the writer himself, always premising that in this work the writer set himself an enormous task, that his view may be one-sided and extreme, and that, even in his self-revelations, we may be on ground as treacherous as when we try to recover Charles Lamb from the hints of Elia.

"Long Will," as he calls himself, in one memorable line, was set to school in early days and learned to love the school and cloister; for one who afterwards was so severe a critic of this world, he speaks kindly of these early days. It may have been at Malvern; and he may have gained then his vague and rather intellectual love of the country and its sights. But in this he never approached Chaucer, who is filled through and through with the outdoor Englishmans appreciation of field and forest and stream; for Langland was as much a town man as Dr. Johnson.

His learning is remarkable. The Bible is, if roughly quoted, at his fingers ends; but he never uses the Wycliffite version, though it must have been accessible in some form before the last recension of the manuscript. In this however he is not singular; for Wyclif never quotes from what is called his own translation. The usual reading of the Fathers supplies Langland

with a few texts and a few illustrations; Gregory, Jerome, Austin and of course Cato are among the writers he has heard most of; indeed to the medievalist Cato may be regarded as a Church Father. The apocryphal gospel of Nicodemus may have helped him in that tremendous section of his poem in which Piers Plowmans fruit, i.e. humanity, is brought from Hell; but it is unsafe to dogmatise, for so much was known by being heard and repeated orally that before Caxtons time a man might possess a very liberal education and yet have never seen a book at all; so much did the writer of that day rely upon his memory. A few French sentences prove little; Chaucer himself, who must have spoken French well, avoids French speech more than Shakespeare does; and there is no hint of Langlands knowing any Greek. It is interesting to think he may have read Chaucers Prologue; let us hope, for the sake of his own peace of mind, that he did not; for he would, I fear, have reckoned Chaucer among the minstrels.

He must have drifted to London for he knows it well: he certainly represents himself as preferring the easy life of a chantry priest to that of a hard-working man. Cornhill and S. Pauls are the most respectable parts of London mentioned by him; but the poorer or disreputable parts mentioned, such as Cocks Lane, Shoreditch, with their stews and their quacks, are many, and their characters are drawn to the life. He says he was married and had a daughter; but he is careful to give wife and daughter equivocal names, which he need not have done. He convicts himself of lax practice in regard to honesty He is extremely careful to point out that whatever in work. may be thought of his opinions in the poem, he is not a loller; indeed, he made verses on the lollers when he lived in Cornhill. He was always poor, always welcome, always critical; but in London his opinions developed and he became one with the mass which new ideas were slowly moving. He found himself the apostle of the poor, the honest quiet poor, whom he came to love passionately. Their poverty, grinding and unceasing, he ascribed to want of philanthropy, robbery, jobbery and bad government. He never ascribed it to simony at Avignon—the sinful city—nor to the French wars, as he might have done had he been writing to-day of his own work; nor, of course, did he understand that there may be a dozen causes for misery, some of the causes being directly attributable to the miserable themselves. He is not in the least ashamed of begging for the poor

or for himself; and indeed the magnificent philanthropy of the medieval Church in its best days had encouraged begging, and perhaps produced the poverty it strove to alleviate. In all centuries (at any rate in England) the condition of the poor has been watched over and alleviated by the rich and the moderately rich in a way that shows, gainsay it who may, that the teaching of Christ in regard to individual responsibility has up to now permeated the country; and though poverty may have overtaken benevolence, and though benevolence itself may be a mistake and philanthropy a crime, no friend of the poor would care to imagine an England denuded instantly of all that has been given and is being freely and gladly given to the poor from definitely religious and Christian sources. This is more true even of pre-Reformation than of post-Reformation England, for in Langlands day the state assumed no responsibility. It must be remembered that he wrote a quarter of a century after the Black Death and England had not in any sense recovered; and it must be further remembered that in his day the alleged enmities of class and class, sex and sex, capital and labour, had not been felt. The rich and the poor, notwithstanding the Peasants Revolt, were nearer one another than they are to-day. The enmities in Langlands day were those of king and nobles, nobles and the middle class; neither the king nor the rich merchant was in theory or practice unfriendly to the people.

Yet, whether he understood the problems or no, his book is more valuable than any contemporary writing: for he wrote from the inside. He tells us what the poor wanted; and only lately, notwithstanding the fact that his book and his teaching have been accessible for five hundred years, has this lesson been learnt. It is a new discovery to us, that the poor have opinions regarding their betterment. It comes almost as a shock to us to read in his pages that his poor required lower rents, better and less adulterated food, warm clothes, and above all the kindly sympathy of people who lived among them and tried to understand them. We can almost hear him saying to us: "Give us these first, and then, if you like, you can go on to model villages and sterilised milk." I respectfully wonder if Mr. Stephen Reynolds and Miss M. Loane, who write with knowledge of our poor, have carefully looked through Piers Plowman; if they have they must have been startled.

Besides loving the poor and hating the wastrel, Langland loved

the Church and hated its household enemies. It is true that (considering his century) a minimum of dogma satisfied him: but with this he combined a maximum of Christ. The Pope, as such, is a legitimate ruler; he seems to know nothing of the rottenness of Rome and Avignon; even the Church machinery was good; but it was worked ill. We who live in a time when the clergy (I use the word of the ministers of all denominations) work hard, are not over-dressed, do not carry forbidden revolvers, do not rob the poor, do not pay money out of the country, do not plead in papal courts, are not absentees or pluralists, and certainly are not rich, can hardly understand that a man of Langlands sympathies should have been, as he certainly was, so strong a defender of the fourteenth-century Church. it he sees the only bulwark against Antichrist; and he cannot even see this bulwark raised unless the friars and monks and parish priests and bishops come with Piers Plowman into the Castle of Unity.

And if he loves the Church, he is at least respectful to the king. Beyond a sharp word now and again to Edward III. and a remonstrance to Richard II., Langland is a kings man; it seems to me that he even has some insight into the difficulties of both sovereigns when he writes that pathetic line:

"But it is hard," quoth the king, "to guide my people to honesty."

Even the great and rich he does not attack indiscriminately; and he certainly believed in those class distinctions which every society and every section of society makes, though it hides them as decently as it can and professes to abhor them.

But lawyers, theologians, most minstrels, physicians and unemployables he cannot away with; and here we see for the first time the narrowness of one who did not understand law or theology, and who could not fiddle or cure the sick. For there must have been, and indeed he allows it, many lawyers who were not bribable, many theologians who knew what they were talking about, some decent-mouthed minstrels and a few satisfactory doctors; but his lines about the unemployable might have been written in 1916.

Here then is the man; a reformer of Church and State and a defender of the poor; failing perhaps from the very immensity of his canvas to paint all his pictures equally well, yet contriving even in his bitterest moments to follow his own advice to the king, "Hear the other side." Again and again he pleads against

his own writing, and you may seek in vain through all the book for one word of self-praise.

His humour is not Chaucers; his coarse passages may be numbered on the fingers of one hand, and they are then very brief and blunt; while Chaucer, like Shakespeare and all the Elizabethans, is crammed with passages which Langland would never have tolerated. He is too much in earnest to waste his time in loose talk; though, if he had wished to do so, the sardonic writer of the Seven Deadly Sins could have put to shame Skelton, Dryden and Wycherley in their own peculiar mistles. Fun there is, satire there is, in abundance; but there is no filth, nor, alas, except in one passage, are there any tears. He is dry-eyed, staring at Antichrist. England is hurrying to the precipice and Piers Plowman is gone.

His choice of metre, if metre it can be called, was no doubt intentional; he meant to get to the ears of the people and this he could only do by alliteration or by ballad. The Chaucerian line would have stamped him as a dilettante in social reform. The result is that the book is not a poem; no juggling will reduce it to rules; no whitewashing will make it all interesting; but it stands crammed with living pictures and full of a terrible anger. Whether he did gain the peoples ear is very doubtful; the one quotation in the trumpet-calls of the 1381 revolt is not at all conclusive; apart from ballad, song and folk-tale, literature has never been thoroughly assimilated by the English people; the people have no time to read. The Bible alone and a certain amount of economic prophecy have sunk deep.

I cannot understand why his book has never been seized on by artists and illustrators; and I venture to call the readers attention particularly to the following descriptions which are full of the power of a poet who carelessly let the poetry go the ride to Westminster, the Vision of the Sins, the description of Piers service to Truth, the description of the cottager, the character of Charity, and the descent into Hell.

This then was the man and this the book which set out to describe fourteenth-century England: for whom was the book intended and why was it written? what were the real pictures as we have them from other sources? is Piers Plowmans indictment true?

Langland was born into a world the great fact of which was the Church. It was everywhere. It possessed nearly, not quite, all the learning of his day; it filled offices which have long since been handed to the laity. Its courts controlled Church affairs and a good deal more than Church affairs-personal morality (save the mark) came largely under its lash and its It was wealthy, national, proud at heart; as the Good Parliament showed, it hated Roman aggression; but it was waiting for a chance of burning heretics—which soon came. Its buildings filled the streets of London and Oxford; the parish church, the cathedral church, the friars convent, the monks abbey, the chantry, the anchorites cell, the mesondieux, and even the schools, all were—the Church. It was as impossible for a reformer to write a poem and not to fill it with the ('hurch as it would seem absurd for a modern reformer to regard the Church as the centre of all. It is the custom to deride the fourteenth-century Church. Langland and Wyclif, so different in other matters, denounce the wholesale simony, the traffic in pardons, the whole institution of the friars, the power of foreign priests, the misused wealth of the Church and the misspent time of her sons; and Chaucer, who could not rise to these heights of indignation, never loses a chance of satire. Even the modern Catholic historian Lingard cannot point to the fourteenth century with satisfaction; and the French Jusserand admits fully the charges of the poets. It is well therefore to realise that if there is no other side to the question, in two respects at least the Church of the fourteenth century has had scanty justice done to it. And first of all, it was not blind to its own The abuses noted in Chaucer and Langland are condemned strongly in a papal letter of the time. In 1340 the Bishop of Durham, in 1378 the Archbishop of Canterbury, pleaded for reform. "Nothing can give a better idea of the wickedness of Pardoners than the actual letters of Popes and Bishops" (Jusserand). Again, the Church was democratic in this, that by it and by it alone the poor mans son saw and took his chance. A long list of archbishops and bishops might easily be written out, all of whom came from the homes of the poor. It was no uncommon thing for a promising serf to receive freedom and to be trained in the service of Church and State; and it is precisely this carelessness as regards the birth, or even the legitimacy, of its clergy that draws down Langlands strong criticism: for Langland, apostle of the poor, believed in gentle The knightly Chaucer, who had been about the world and fought, thinks nothing of the fact that his parson, the

gentlest, sweetest saint in all his writings, was own brother to a ploughman who had "ilad of donge ful many a fother," but Langland wishes that the Church would keep the poor in their places. The following paragraph quoted freely is worth consideration: "The most striking feature of the centuries to the sixteenth is the way in which the Church opened up a career to all ranks and classes of the people. There was of course always a strong aristocratical element among the clergy . . . the middle classes supplied a great number of parish chaplains, assistant curates, chantry priests, gild priests; young men born and bred as serfs were not infrequently educated and ordained. Among archbishops only, Richard came from humble parents; E. Rich was son of a merchant, R. Kilwardby was a Dominican friar; W. Reynolds was son of a baker; Chichele was a shepherd boy picked up and educated by William of Wykeham; Cranmers people were small squires; R. Flambard, the great justiciar of Henry I., was the son of a poor Norman priest; Richard of Wych, the saintly bishop of Winchester, was son of a decayed farmer at Droitwich, and for several years worked as a labourer; the famous Grosseteste was of a poor family at Stradbrooke in Suffolk " (Cutts, Parish Priests, 133). Sir Robert Sale, who died so heroically in 1381, fighting against the insurgents, was himself a serf who had risen to knighthood, and was captain-general of Norwich. Only through the theory and practice of the medieval Church did poor mens sons become lawyers, architects, sheriffs, scribes, physicians and teachers.

Chaucer understands the theory of the Church Catholic, a theory which has never changed, that all men before it are equal. In this Eastern and Western religions are alike. The practice of the Church has indeed varied; but the curious anomaly may be noted that the world has invariably taken a view which is at variance with that of the Church. The worlds practice is to treat men as equal, as far as it can, and not to hurt their feelings; that they are equal in any sense it never will believe.

In another matter the medieval Church demands the respect of its modern critic. It aided education; indeed, it was the only educator, and, directly by its teaching, indirectly by its encouragement of benevolence, it founded places of education which flourished till the Reformation. Writers as diverse as Mr. A. F. Leach, Mr. Bass Mullinger, Professor Thorold Rogers, relying on statutes, sermons, charters, and quoting freely from

contemporary authors, come to the same conclusion, that the pre-Reformation Church was the friend, not the enemy, of the education of the poor; for the rich man either derided all education or had his own peculiar way of obtaining it. If Church advice had been followed, "the battle of and for modern education, especially primary education, would have been infinitely easier to fight." Richard II. rejected a proposal to forbid villeins to send their children to school to learn clergée (knowledge): "Every man or woman, of what state or condition he be, shall be free to set their son or daughter to take learning at

any school that pleaseth them within the realm."

The Church then, full of mistakes, crammed with internecine and often unpatriotic quarrels, but still in theory, and to a great extent in practice, the poor mans Church, filled the picture. Its spiritual pretensions were high—its ecclesiastical pretensions were enormous—but its social pretensions were not those of some of the later centuries. The world will always yield (or has till now always yielded) to spiritual pretensions when adequately supported by the consistent life. It clings even now to the legend of S. Francis, whose spiritual pretensions, under the guise of humility, were an unconscious travesty of those of his Master; even ecclesiastical pretensions it will listen to, though with a smile, when based on what it loves—sympathy, charity, humanity; but the social pretension which grew from wealth and from an ill-defined class feeling, it cannot reconcile with the teaching of the poor parson of the Canterbury Tales. there must always be; man is not happy without them, and they exist in every station of society; but society knows at heart that they should be decently covered, and the truest mark of a "gentleman" is to hide his "gentlemanliness." Castes there must always be; Piers Plowman himself belonged to the very highest, whether we look at him in his mittens or as riding to the gates of Hell; and of all the characters in the poem his spiritual pretensions are the greatest. Yet, by virtue of his freedom from social pretensions, he is intensely democratic.

The Church of any country, any century, can hope to recover lost ground among what are called the masses, not by a whittling down of dogma, nor by a renunciation of claims to denounce the sins of society—for the human society is the Church—but by a frank abjuration of all social and economic pretensions. The history of the friars, as well as that of the Salvation Army, point alike to the right road and to the parting of the ways.

The parish church was the special property of the people who lived round it. When small, it still had some gild window, some long-remembered connection with the great or small village It rose, as it often rises to-day, the only building of the human souls ambition, above the meaner roofs; it was the centre of village life and the meeting-place of the dead. When large, it served for examination room, playhouse, even dancing floor; it was open every day and all day; it had its daily services. was the rallying point of the English villages. Parsons might be and were absentees; it might be served by the unworthy; but it and its services were there. Langland points clearly to abuses. Once a fortnight perhaps some interfering friar of one of the four orders (Cain they were pleasantly nicknamed by Wyclif) would come preaching in the churchyard; and sometimes the pardoner or limiter would invade even the church itself, when the priest was not strong enough to prevent it. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that a most worldly acquisitiveness was the secret of the friars activity and of the parsons hatred of them; they laid their hands on shrift money and on the widows mite, and they persuaded the richer people to ask for and to pay for letters of fraternity. The beautiful description of a friars church in Piers Plowmans Creed might without change of a word be written of any well-preserved Gothic church; it must be remembered that all this wealth of stone and carving and gold was then new, burnished, shining, not toned down to melancholy beauty by the lapse of centuries.

Friar and parson were, it is probable, unlearned; the parsons charged the friars with interference, the friars charged the parsons with ignorance and neglect of their parishes. The terrible picture of Parson Sloth in Langland must of course apply only to a few, but comic instances of parsonic ignorance are "Robert de Umfraville, clerk, was instituted in 1317 by Bishop Stapledon to the rectory of Lapford, but the bishop required he should go to grammar school and should come to the bishop once a year, that the bishop might know what progress he was making. The young man sent in his resignation in Against such a picture may always be quoted the poor parson of the Prologue. The friar, however, was the better speaker, for it was his métier to speak; and the occasional visitor gets more credit than the preacher to whom the parish is accustomed. The friar was ready, polite, pleasant, popular; and his ways with women were so successful as to become proverbial.

Nothing in Langland said against the friars comes near the bitter satire of Chaucers laugh; and the praise of the friar by the wife of Bath would have shamed any one but a friar.

If the parson objected to the friar he must in many cases have objected to the chantry priest also. Rarely could a man, a paid cleric, go on singing masses every day without interfering with the parish. It was a lucrative and easy life. Sometimes the church itself was turned into a chantry, sometimes the chantry priest kept a little school. In S. Pauls alone there were 70 chantries and III obits (for occasional masses), and in 1378 the weak Archbishop Sudbury, who was murdered by the 1381 mob. speaks of the lives of these mass-singers as tending to the detestable scandal of churchmen (Besant, 2, 134). It could not have been satisfactory for the parson, learned or unlearned, good or bad, to have so many inspectors and critics of his work about him. He lived in a limelight which darkens shadows, and strange to say, he has had no apologist but Chaucer the courtly poet. Pity the poor parson in any century who does his multifarious work unnoticed by superiors and sometimes unthanked by his people.

The parson, the friar, the seller of pardons, as well as the higher ecclesiastics, and of course all monks, were vowed to celibacy, but it does not seem that celibacy meant chastity, or that it prevented, in the case of parsons, the irregular marriages which the Church frowned on even to the days of Queen Elizabeth. "The secular cleric," says Cutts, "was not bound to be celibate. But if his marriage came up before the ecclesiastical courts it was then voidable. Consequently, to make his marriage incapable of legal proof, he had it performed irregularly in some particular. Then it was illegal, derogatory, but not immoral or disreputable." In this the Church theory conquered till the Reformation. As Matthew Paris said long before, "the Pope deprived the clergy of sons and the devil sent them nephews." Langland, however, admits the chastity of many churchmen, and when Langland speaks well of even part of a class we must be careful of condemning it.

In any comment on Langland the monks, nons and their convents may be almost disregarded. There were no doubt many who came out of the cloister and who rode to hounds; many nuns who deserved the terrible picture drawn by Wrath (p. 78); but they receive less castigation at the hands of the poets than does the rest of the ecclesiastical machinery. Indeed, the

monks seem to be outside the machinery; and the fierce envy of conventual wealth, which was one of the main causes of the Reformation, had not yet made itself greatly felt. As for the reformers of the day, they plainly derided the monks and passed them by-

But the picture of Church matters is by no means even outlined in as yet. There remains to be considered the rabble of hangers-on, and under this uncomplimentary term may be included foreign agents, pardoners, pilgrims, palmers, hermits, ancres, recluses of all kinds, and those officials who got their living out of Church moneys, fines, or offerings. They indeed form a motley crowd. Chaucers picture of some (e.g. the Pardoner and Summoner) is very clear; we see the papal agent, approved or connived at by the English bishop, selling and showing his absurd relics to the gaping crowd; the summoner ready to pounce on any defenceless person and bring him or her before an ecclesiastical court. For the summoner there may be some defence. For the pardoner it seems there is none. M. Jusserand, who would defend him if he could, admits that Chaucers picture is true; it is more damaging to admit that the truly Catholic Langland is more contemptuous even than Chaucer. But nothing disturbs the pardoner; for insolence of hypocrisy which recognises itself there is nothing to beat his Prologue and his beautiful tale; only the scathing Billingsgate of the Host brings a flush of anger to his cheek. It is true that to-day the pardoner has vanished from the streets of England; but his audiences have not vanished; and the crowds that buy nostrums from the magazine advertisements and bottles at street corners. and the stealthier and richer clients of the crystal-gazer, cannot afford even to laugh at fourteenth-century England. The pardoner has turned quack and gipsy: that is all.

The foreigner met with less approval than the pardoner. In 1353 and 1393 Englishmen were forbidden to appeal to the papal courts; Langland sees them appealing against the king. In 1351 foreigners were forbidden to hold English livings. Both these statutes aimed at extinguishing what were felt to be un-English proceedings.

But the pilgrim and the recluse were nearer to the people than the summoner, the pardoner, or the foreigner. On every road the pilgrim, with his liquified saints blood, his vernicle picture, and his scallop-shell, told of his escapes, his travels and his relics. He was a genuine person—when he had travelled: he

had been, as the wife of Bath had, over many a strange stream. and if he liked had leave to lie all his life after. Langlands and Chaucers pictures are so familiar that we may illustrate from one of their contemporaries, Sir John Mandeville, a clergyman, who, writing his book in Latin, French and English, distinctly states that he had been a great traveller. The cross and reed and sponge he saw at Constantinople; he fought against Arabs for the Sultan of Babylon; he vouches for Ethiopians with one large foot and one only, used as an umbrella; for miraculous draughts of fishes, which came to the shore to be caught out of pure reverence for the king of the country, who has a very large family; men without heads, men with eyes in their shoulders. dwerghes (dwarfs) with no mouths, but only a lytylle round hole. men with horses feet, all the marvels of the medieval mapmakers are vouched for by Sir John. On his return he showed his book to the Pope, who had his statements of things seen and heard, examined, and "my book was proved for true." In the Roman du Renart the fox starts on pilgrimage with staff and scrip and takes sheep and donkey (Bernart the arch-priest) with him. Long before Erasmus, with his bitter satire, the people had begun to laugh at the pilgrim; he knew too much, he had been too far. But pilgrimages are by no means things of the past, nor can they be lightly laughed at. "They were dangerous, meritorious, and they showed a way to heaven. They relieved a man of work, they showed him amusing people. He and his licence were free of the roads" (Besant). (bourdon) and scrip (a small bag), with bottle, rosary, shells and flasks, or other adornments, he proved his story; if he came from Palestine he wore strips of coloured cloth, sewn cross-wise on the shoulder, and the palm was sewn to clothes or carried in the hand. Vernicles (the picture of Christ), crosskeys and effigies of S. Peter and S. Paul were worn by Roman pilgrims; but alas, the Rome or Compostella pilgrim had not always "W. Blakeney, shetil-maker, who pretended to be a hermit, was brought into the Guildhall for that whereas he was able to work for his food and raiment, he went about barefoot and with long hair under the guise of sanctity, and pretending to be a hermit, saying he was such and that he had made pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Rome, Venice and the city of Seville in Spain, and had received many good things from divers persons ... he acknowledged that for the last six years he had lived by such fetches and deceits, and that he never was in the parts

aforesaid "(Riley, 1412). At home, besides the great S. Thomas and the many roods, S. Cuthbert at Durham, S. William of York, little S. William of Norwich, S. Wulfstan of Worcester, and S. Swithin of Winchester were among saints to whom pilgrimages were frequently made (Cutts). The reader must be reminded that there is no adequate ground for questioning the occasional "miracles" which occurred and still occur in such pilgrimages. One of the most brilliant modern productions of a cultivated mind and of a religious life, I refer to the Saintes Evangiles of M. Lasserre, owes its origin directly to a miraculous cure wrought at Lourdes. Scientists may explain, Protestants may question; but neither pilgrimages nor "miracles" are dead—yet.

The recluse—the true, strict recluse—has nothing to recommend him or her. The ghastly silence, the dirty walled-up cell, the long lone cold hours, form a picture compared with which the strictest life of Carmelite or Brigittine was comfort itself. It is suggested that the slits called lepers windows were for the use of anchorites, who had their cells outside the church walls. It is true that the recluse could in some cases talk to the outside world, and was sometimes so much consulted by the women of the place that he became a nuisance; it is equally true that some recluses did enjoy comparative comfort, though they were tied to one cell; but the true ancre was one of those who, like monk of the desert or trappist of to-day, is isolated, silent, dead. The service read over him and the subsequent condition of his days may be read and understood by the reader of Besants London.

Hermits were the good-tempered Timons of the day; they lived in houses, they helped travellers, they were not always poor. There is no need to waste pity on the hermit; he came from all ranks of society, as his modern counterpart does. It is not every man who is smitten with the love of the society of his own kind; and there are to-day hermits even in cities, as there were in Langlands time.

But all of whom I have been speaking were officially connected with the Church. There remains another class of friars who roamed the country before Langland had ceased writing, and who carried no licence from pope, bishop or archdeacon. I refer to Wyclifs poor priests. It is doubtful whether Langland means us to take any notice of them; whatever may have been his attitude to Wyclif, he either does not know the name of

Lollard, or he intends to sever himself entirely from lollers or Lollards. There is no question connected with the 1381 revolt which is so obscure as this: did Wyclif through his poor priests preach a social as well as an ecclesiastical revolution? When we find historians such as Mr. Thorold Rogers and Mr. Trevelyan disagreeing toto cælo on this point, it is well for the ordinary reader to suspend judgment. It may be enough for us to note that there seems to be no proof that Langlands book or any part of it was used to inflame the social unrest, and another interpretation may be put upon the often quoted passages in the message from the Great Society.

A much more profitable inquiry turns us away from pope and cardinal, friar and monk, hermit and pilgrim, Wyclif and Swynderby, to the central figure which, as I have said before, glances in and out of the work in such elusive and mysterious fashion. It is long before we meet Piers Plowman, but when we do meet him he never wholly leaves the stage; if not actually speaking, his presence is felt: it is the book of Piers Plowman. So strongly does the reader feel this that it has been suggested that we have here but a fragment of genuine alliterative folkliterature of which Piers Plowman is the hero. The Plowman leads the way to Truth, whose servant he is, and the cutpurse and the pardoner desert him; a stray common woman is left, and he and she begin, but others join in the great pilgrimage. Before it is begun the half-acre has to be ploughed, and knight and wastrel have to help. Ladies must help too; the work of all is for the weal of all, and Piers makes his last will and testament. Then the unemployables wrangle and Piers calls Hunger and Famine to help him; the gentry cannot. The pardon is sent by the Almighty to poor Piers Plowman, and henceforth he is a symbol which leads men to Do-well, Do-better and Do-best. He is referred to as the great example, the great teacher, until again he appears upon the scene riding to Jerusalem as the Good Samaritan to joust with death for the deliverance of humanity from hell. As Prince he sails hell-wards and the victory is assured. But Piers as Christ is gone, and Antichrist takes his place; the Piers that follows is the spirit of Church unity; the mysterious plowman, saviour, man, Christ, is now again lost, and must be sought for in a new Grail quest over the wide world. Small wonder that readers are in doubt as to Langlands meaning. I take it that Langland wilfully confused the character, for in his own mind there was no separation

between the God-in-man and the man-in-God. As Bishop Stubbs says, "The full likeness to Jesus Christ, the ideal Son of God, is stored up in the Plowman, in the common man of the street and of the mill and of the workshop." Above every class and caste, sympathising with all, thinking nothing too high, nothing 'too low for him to notice, Piers represents the best religious thought of which Langland was capable, mans likeness to Christ and even his identification with him being made possible by the very nature of Christs appearance in the world. Love could not bear to remain in heaven; it must take mankind on it or die.

Allegory pressed hard loses its charm. If Piers Plowman were as clear outlined as Christian, the mystery of the Plowman would not fit in as it does with the chaos of the scene. He seems to suit the kaleidoscope of the field full of folk which is now a city, now a plain, now a procession, now a church, now a court, now a desolate land along which trains of pilgrims go—and always a dream. Battles and law courts vanish, Cornhill and Jerusalem disappear, and the sleeper is left upon the misty hills. From the Malvern Hills the mist never wholly goes; only now and then stands out, as in the Arthurian vision, the great figure—crowned.

Yet, though the writer leaves his work in despondency and gloom, something had been accomplished. To have seen Piers Plowman working in that whirl and worry of politics was something: to have realised that figure made life worth living to the writer, though death should be but, as he called it, the unknitter

of all care and the beginning of rest.

This is the reward of the spiritual reformer, whether he be a Francis, a Shelley or a Langland: that he catches glimpses of the impossible. The light that never will be on land or sea is his inspiration, and far above any amelioration of social ethics is the spiritual sense of the son of man ploughing the fourteenth-century fields, pushing the pilgrims through the strait gate and riding through Cheapside or Jerusalem to get him his gilt spurs and his slashed shoon. Langland, the poor wandering masspriest, saw over old S. Pauls the vision splendid, as a later singer, poorer than Langland, in the same London, almost in the same street, saw it and could write:

"O world invisible, we view thee;

O world intangible, we touch thee;

O world unknowable, we know thee;

Inapprehensible, we clutch thee.

The angels keep their ancient places, Turn but a stone and start a wing; 'Tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces That miss the many-splendoured thing.

But (when so sad thou canst not sadder) Cry; and upon thy so sore loss Shall shine the traffic of Jacobs ladder, Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross.

Yea, in the night, my Soul, my Daughter, Cry—clinging Heaven by the hems; And lo, Christ walking on the water, Not of Gennesareth but Thames!"

If we leave the religious outlook and look upon the social side of England, we are struck by the constant repetition of the note of misery. Yet it does not appear that the century was as bad as its successor. The drain of the French wars must have been felt; yet the Great Pestilence had, in its awful way, lessened by fifty per cent. the number of mouths that had to be fed.

But Langlands complaint is not merely that the poor want food and raiment; it would appear from him that they needed protection against themselves and against the great. The adulteration of food and drink, the want of the poor mans lawyer, the general corruption and deceit all round him, the extremes of luxury and penury—these are the things that wring his heart. By way of illustration the following may be quoted from Riley as instances of dishonesty in trade; the first instance being one of the eternal quack, without whom no century can live.

In 1382, "Roger Clerk was attached to make answer to Roger atte Hacche that whereas no physician or surgeon should intermeddle with medicines but those who are experienced, the said Roger Clerk, who knew nothing of the arts aforesaid nor understood anything of letters, came to the house of him Roger atte Hacche and there saw one Johanna, the wife of the said Roger, who was then lying ill, and gave the said Roger to understand that he was experienced and skilled in the art of medicine.

"Whereupon the said Roger gave him 12 pence in part payment of a larger sum that he was to pay him in case the said Johanna should be healed. And upon this the same Roger Clerk gave the said Roger an old parchment cut or scratched across, being the leaf of a certain book, and rolled it up in a piece of cloth of gold, and this he put about her neck, but in no

way did it profit her.

"And the said Roger Clerk was asked what the worth of such a parchment was, whereupon he said that upon it was written a good charm for fevers. Upon being asked by the court what were the words of this charm, he said, 'Anima Christi sanctifica me, corpus Christi salva me, sanguis Christi inebria me,' and the parchment being then examined, not one of these words was found written thereon. And he was told by the court that a straw beneath his foot would be of as much avail for fevers as this said charm of his was, whereupon he fully granted that it would be so. And because that the said Roger was in no way a literate man, and seeing that he was found to be an infidel and altogether ignorant of the art of physic, it was adjudged that the same Roger Clerk should be led through the middle of the city with trumpets and pipes, he riding upon an horse without a saddle, the said parchment and a whetstone for his lies being hung about his neck, an urinal also being hung before him and another urinal on his back" (Riley, 465).

The following are referred to:

"... making pots of bad metal that come to nothing and melt; mixing any manner of wares whereof the good thing may be impaired by the old; the dubbing or moistening of any merchandise, by reason whereof the weight may be increased; selling putrid beef; making of hats, shoes or brides of poor or forbidden material... stealing dough by making holes in the tables used for baking; using false nets in the Thames; selling ale out of tankards with thickened bottoms.

"Godfrey le Rede was attached with his bread, and this bread was weighed and adjudicated upon before Stephen de Alyndone, mayor, and it was found that the penny loaf of light bread of the said Godfrey weighed 15s., and was wanting of its right weight to the amount of 8.2½, and upon this he said he did not make the loaf aforesaid nor had any share therein for gain or for love, and he put himself upon the country as to the same. And the country (jury) came by John de Kyngyestone, pelterer, and others in the panel. Who being sworn said upon their oath that George the aforesaid is partner with John de Jernemue and Robert de Donstaple, bakers, who keep a bakehouse without

Newgate just opposite Cokkes-lane, and that he shares with them in the said bakehouse and is their oven-man. Therefore it was adjudged that he should have the punishment of the hurdle" (Riley, 119).

"John Rightwys and John Penrose, taverners, being accused of selling red wine unsound and unwholesome, John Rightwys was acquitted and John Penrose shall drink a draught of the same wine and the remainder shall be poured on his head" (Riley, 1364).

"Robin Porter, servant of John Gibbe, baker of Stratford, when the bread inspection came, knowing that the bread of his master was not of full weight, took a penny loaf and in it falsely and fraudulently inserted a piece of iron weighing about 4 oz. with intent to make the said loaf weigh more in deceit of the people" (Riley, 1387).

As a lover of the poor Langland hated adulteration; but it is difficult to understand why he shared so clearly with the 1381 rebellion its hatred of lawyers. We can see why the Rev. John Ball and his well-to-do friends burnt manor-rolls and charters and hunted lawyers to death. A lawyer to them meant a man who carried out or brought into operation the hated statutes which for forty years tried to fix wages after the Black Death. But Langland, as Jusserand says, cursed the revolt, and explicitly states that he did not sympathise with the cry for high wages. I think the explanation lies in Langlands belief that no juryman or siser, no panel, no inquest or collection of witnesses and neighbours collected to weigh the truth was ever honest. They were all got at by Meed. And the poor man, being poor and unversed in the ways of bribery, could get no lawyer to help There was no man to set the poor right in the usage of the law courts, civil and ecclesiastical. Justice should have been freely administered, not bought and sold, nor even paid for. Langlands Utopia is still Utopia, for even to-day the friendly lawyer will counsel his friend to keep clear of the honest but distrusted courts—distrusted because of long bills and unsatisfactory conclusions. The poor mans doctor is with us, a real blessing; but the poor mans lawyer has not yet made his appearance in the land.

Of corruption Langland cannot say enough. Meed is over all; Simony, the worst bane of the medieval Church (as a Catholic

writer puts it), was only one of the hydras heads. The most shameless bribery went on in high places, and no more disgraceful instance can be given than that of Richard Lyon, a condemned minister of the Crown, who actually sent a barrel of gold to the dying Prince, in order to win his help. To insult the Black Prince thus at any time of his life would have been bad enough, but so to deride and flatter the purest friend of the commons when he lay helpless and in grievous pain seems one of the most shameless acts in history.

Beyond the corruption and the inability to get justice done for the poor man, Langland turned his careful and observant eye on luxury, especially on luxury in dress. Chaucer is at one with him, and though he laughs at the excess of dress in his poems, in his prose he very nearly calls it one of the eight deadly sins. It would seem as if modern luxury in dress were really less than that of the fourteenth century, and the wife of Baths matinée hat was as broad as is a targe, surely an acreage to which we have not yet attained. The regulations of the time are very particular in their condemnation of the use of various furs by the common lewd women who dwell in the city of London. forbidding them to wear any manner of noble budge; but Pernel Proudheart was by no means the only offender; in 1363 sumptuary laws had been passed regulating the dress of England. Even the clergy dressed in all colours and carried short swords, and it is said did not always take the trouble to put on a black gown at a funeral.

As for arms and armour, Langland seems to hate them far more than the luxurious dress. He was no soldier like Chaucer, and took no delight in enumerating the pieces of armour worn by the knight. To him armour meant weapons and weapons meant wounds, and war was as barbarous as it had seemed to the old Hebrew prophet. Chivalry and its accompanying virtues meant less than nothing and vanity to the chantry priest; and very greatly would he have disapproved of Robert Newby, rector of Whitchurch, who leaves his brother his best sword; of the vicar of Gaynford, who leaves his best suit of armour and all of his arrows; still more would he have admonished John Wyndhill, rector of Arnecliffe, who in 1431 leaves a copy of *Piers Plowman* and green sanguine and murrey gowns and a baselard (knife) with ivory and silver handle.

He dislikes the feasting and the minstrels as much as the weapons; they are Judas children, tellers of loose stories, and

he would have answered to any one of them who said he had a licence as the indignant sixteenth-century writer answered, "Have you a licence from Christ Jesus?"

These fighters and minstrels and wastrels moved him to fierce indignation. But his heaviest wrath is reserved for the discontented workman, and for the man who will not work. Though he hated lawyers who tried to get the Statute of Labourers enforced, he had no sympathy at all with the men who wished to force wages higher. It is amusing to see how many statutes and regulations were passed against the able-bodied beggars. No person, according to statute, was allowed to relieve them, and in 1359 occurs the following entry:

"Forasmuch as many men and women and others of divers counties who might work to the help of the common people have betaken themselves out of their own country to the City of London, and do go about begging there so as to have their own ease and repose, not wishing to labour or work for their sustenance, to the great damage of such the common people, and also do waste divers alms which would otherwise be given to many poor folk such as lepers, blind, halt and persons oppressed with old age and divers other maladies, we do therefore command that all those who go about begging and who are able to work shall quit the said city between now and Monday next" (Riley).

"John Warde of York and R. Lynham of Somerset were questioned for that whereas they were stout enough to work for their food and raiment and had their tongues to talk with, they did pretend they were mutes, they went about carrying a two-ell measure and an iron hook and pincers and a piece of leather in shape like a part of a tongue edged with silver and with writing around it: 'This is the tongue of R. Warde:' with which instruments they gave persons to understand they were traders and that they had been plundered and robbed of their goods, they making an horrible noise like unto a roaring and opening their mouths, to the manifest deceit of the whole of the people" (Riley, 1380).

An extract from the Standard of October 6, 1911, is interesting by way of comment:

"William Thomas, a blind maker, of East Surrey Road, was charged with begging from foot passengers at Rosebery Avenue,

Clerkenwell. A constable said he heard Thomas say to a gentle-

man: 'Give a penny to a poor old cripple.'

"Thomas was bound and bandaged on his first appearance in court, splinters and slings being used for his arms and legs. He now came up on remand without any of these professional impedimenta. The officer said that there was only an old wrist strain. He was sentenced to three months' hard labour."

And in the daily press of October 11, 1911, I find a magistrate recommending an iron muzzle for quarrelsome women. In Langlands time branks (leathern gags) were used. As for the inefficiency of work of which Langland so bitterly complains, the reader may be referred to *The Common Growth* of Miss M. Loane, written last year:

"In another small town where lads professed that work of any kind was extremely hard to get, I found an old established tradesman, a leading councillor and a J.P., taking down the shutters and sweeping out the shop. . . . I had the loafing son of a widow in my mind. The worthy justice also knew the widows son and many others. Clinging to his broom he hastily assured me that the loss of time was nothing compared with what he had wasted in trying to make boys do the work."

And Langlands beggars, who will have hot meat quite hot, and that of the best, find their modern counterparts:

"As to bacon, I can't get them (cottagers) to try good Danish at $8\frac{1}{2}d$, though ordinary English is up to 11d. just now, and the best is at a fancy price. And none but the best English cheese will do for them, however small a bit their money will run to."—The Common Growth (Miss M. Loane), 1911.

Truly the fourteenth century does not seem to be so very far away.

The tragic events in the period of history over which Langland cast his eye were the Black Death of 1349, the death of the Black Prince in 1376, and the Peasants Revolt of 1381. The Black Death, by emptying the land of labour, was the cause of the famous statute by which for forty years an attempt was made to regulate and keep down the wages of the free-contracting labourer. The consequent discontent, rendered greater by the continuation of the French wars, swelled into the Peasants

Revolt: but that revolt would in all probability never have occurred had the Black Prince, who was on the side of the disaffected, lived to make headway against the nobles. Parliament, though ready to fight for the people, could do little; the deeds of the Good Parliament of 1376 were writ in water; "all its acts were cancelled, and the statute-book bears no trace of the greatest assembly of the period." The day of reckoning Opinions are freely divided on the subject of the revolt. We seem to know everything about it except the answer to this question, "Who was at the back of it?" Some say the well-to-do middle class in the country; some hint that the youthful king used the revolt, if he did not actually suggest it, as a weapon against the great nobles. Some again say, while others deny, that Wyclifs poor priests engineered what was known as the Great Society. We may be certain of this, that Langland strongly disapproved of it, although, as Professor Thorold Rogers thinks, the revolt may have put back the Reformation for a century and a half. The revolt failed, and Langland, seeing only its turbulence and murders, was content that it should fail; he had no hopes for his day from any social change; the horizon was that of "the collied night;" he was a social reformer from one standpoint only—the standpoint of religion. Without this, according to him, all social reform is meaningless, and must lead to greater luxury and greater discontent. None but Piers Plowman can save the people that he loved.

For above all writers he is the peoples friend. None is more intolerant of their sad condition, none is more outspoken than he to king, bishop, knight, friar and huckster. The poor he has always in his heart. We do well to put up statues to Howard and to Quintin Hogg, and Guy dreams in stone among the people whom he helped; but as yet no statue stands in Cornhill, no glass blazes in the Abbey in memory of this champion of the poor. Perhaps it is better so, considering his indignant condemnation of the stained window and the church advertisement. Like Thomas à Kempis, he would prefer to be unknown and thought nothing of; and his work is, by wicked irony, interesting only to the student of history and the examince. The book, however, demands—and never more loudly than now—that it should be read again and again by any who care to see the bitterness and the hope, the despair and the exultation of him who wrote four centuries ago the Vision of the Peoples Christ.

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That come before the swallow dares, and take The winds of March with beauty.

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